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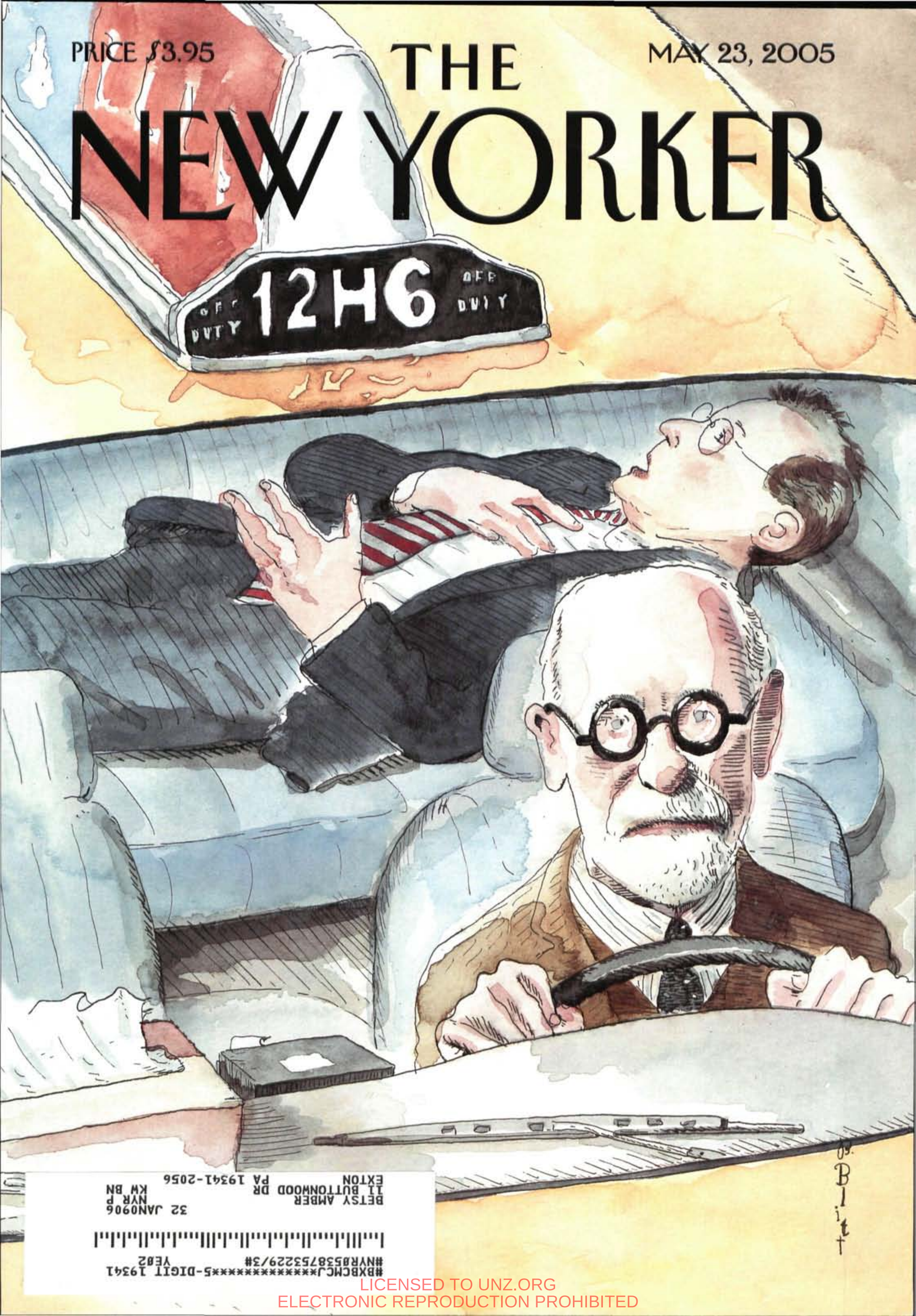
THE NEW YORKER

MAY 23, 2005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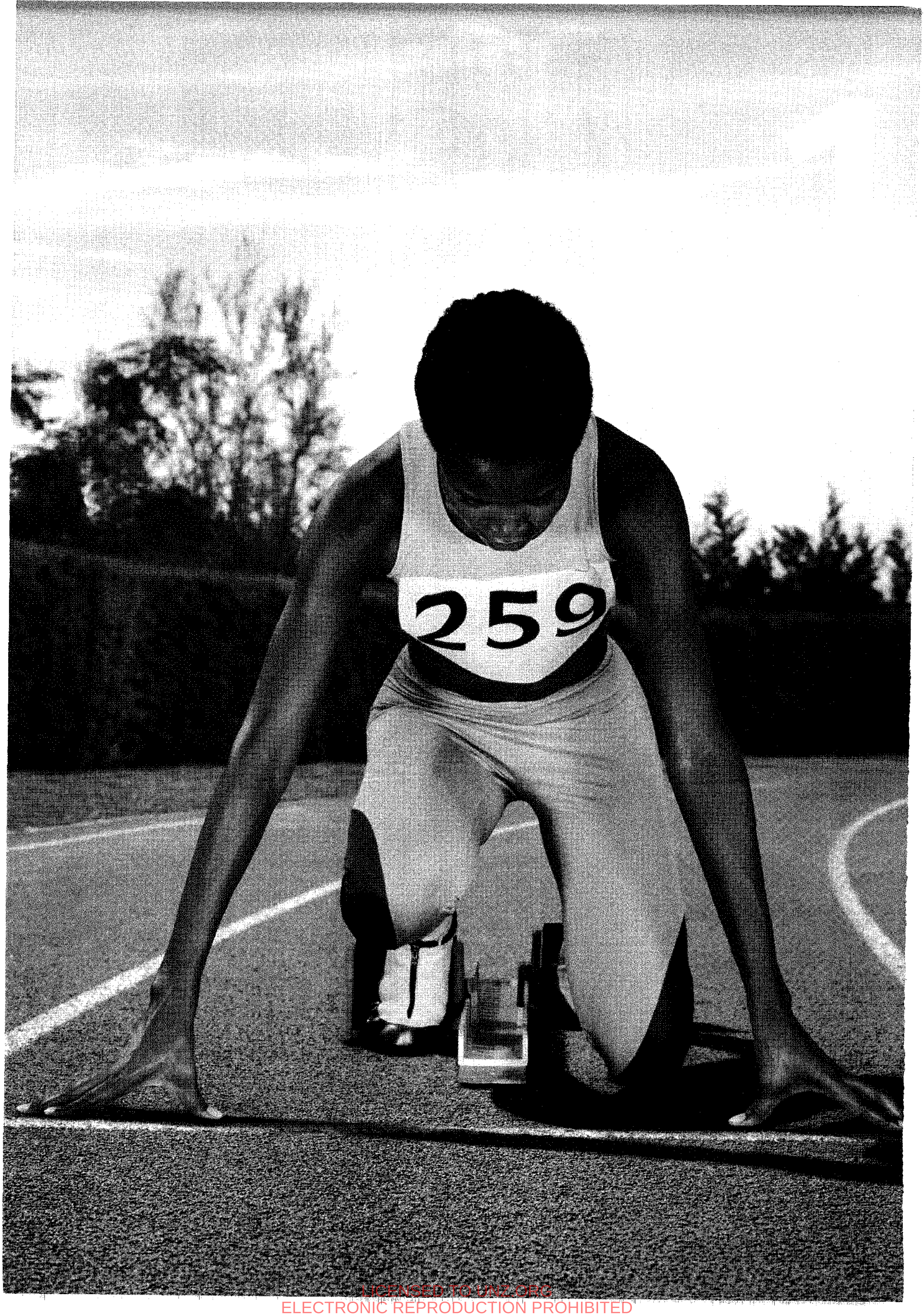
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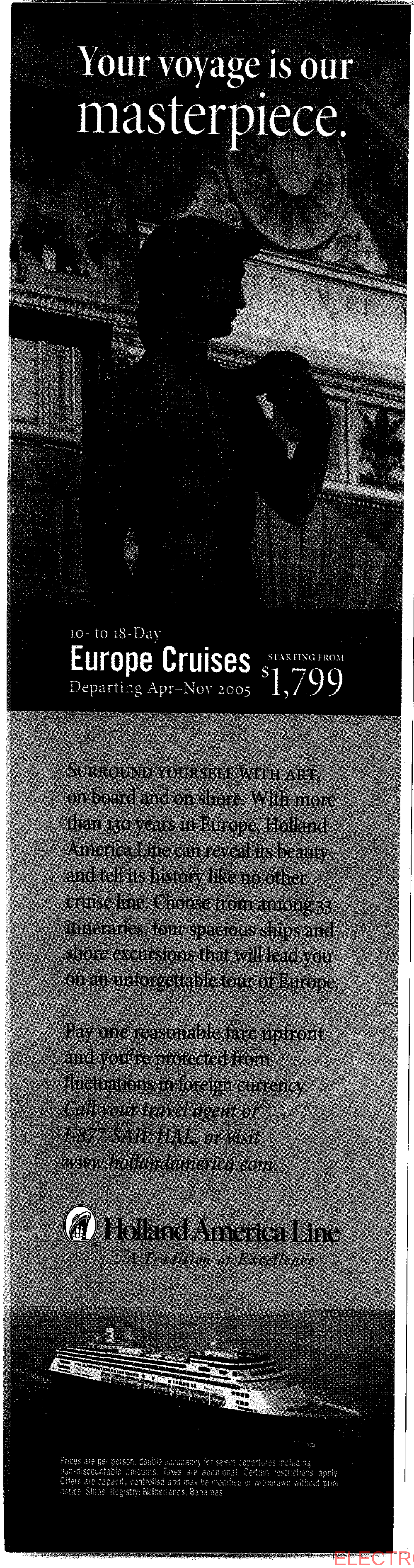

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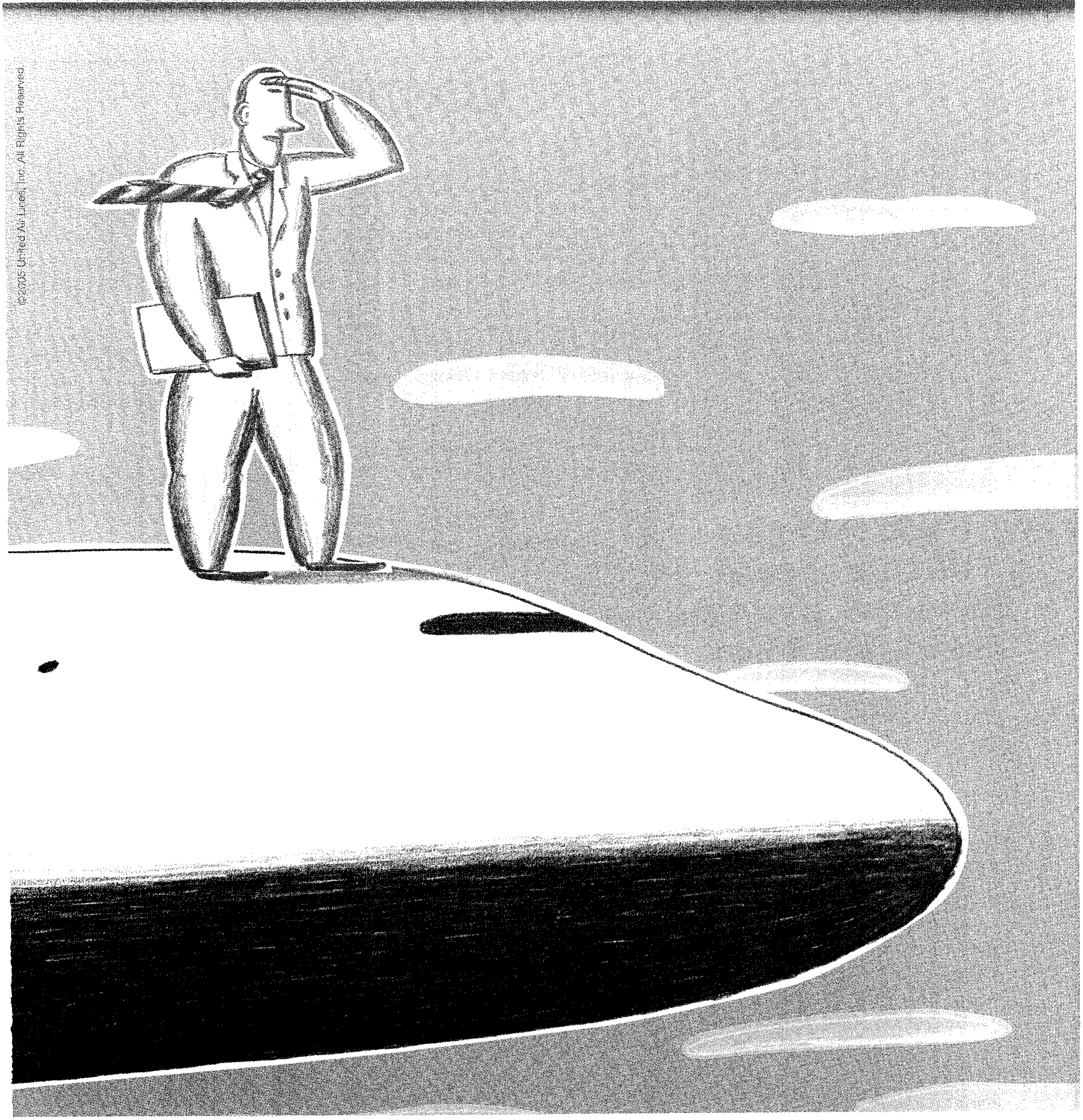

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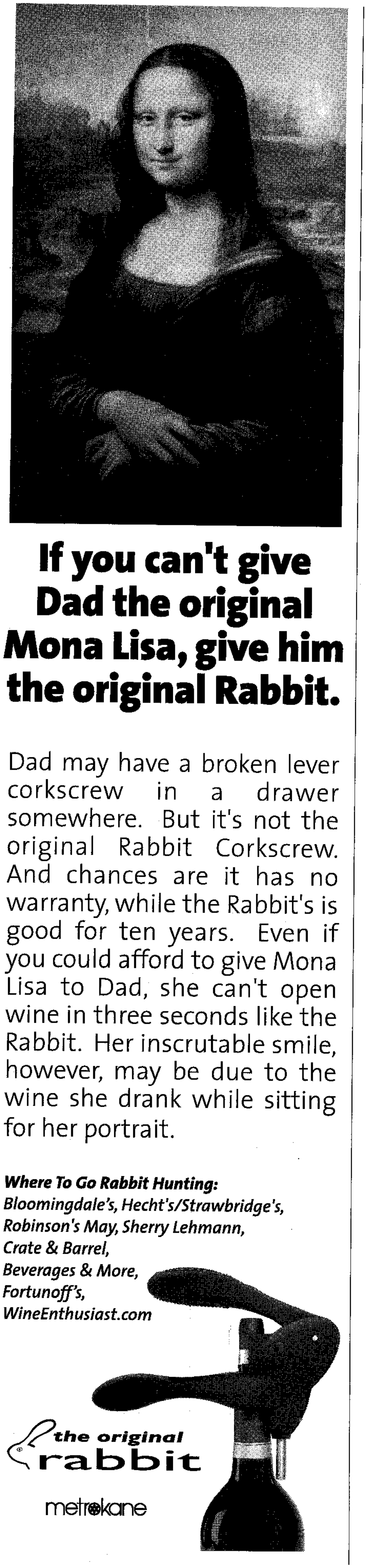
If you can't give Dad the original Mona Lisa, give him the original Rabbit.

Dad may have a broken lever corkscrew in a drawer somewhere. But it's not the original Rabbit Corkscrew. And chances are it has no warranty, while the Rabbit's is good for ten years. Even if you could afford to give Mona Lisa to Dad, she can't open wine in three seconds like the Rabbit. Her inscrutable smile, however, may be due to the wine she drank while sitting for her portrait.

Where To Go Rabbit Hunting:
Bloomingdale's, Hecht's/Strawbridge's,
Robinson's May, Sherry Lehmann,
Crate & Barrel,
Beverages & More,
Fortunoff's,
WineEnthusiast.com

the original rabbit
metrokane

CONTRIBUTORS

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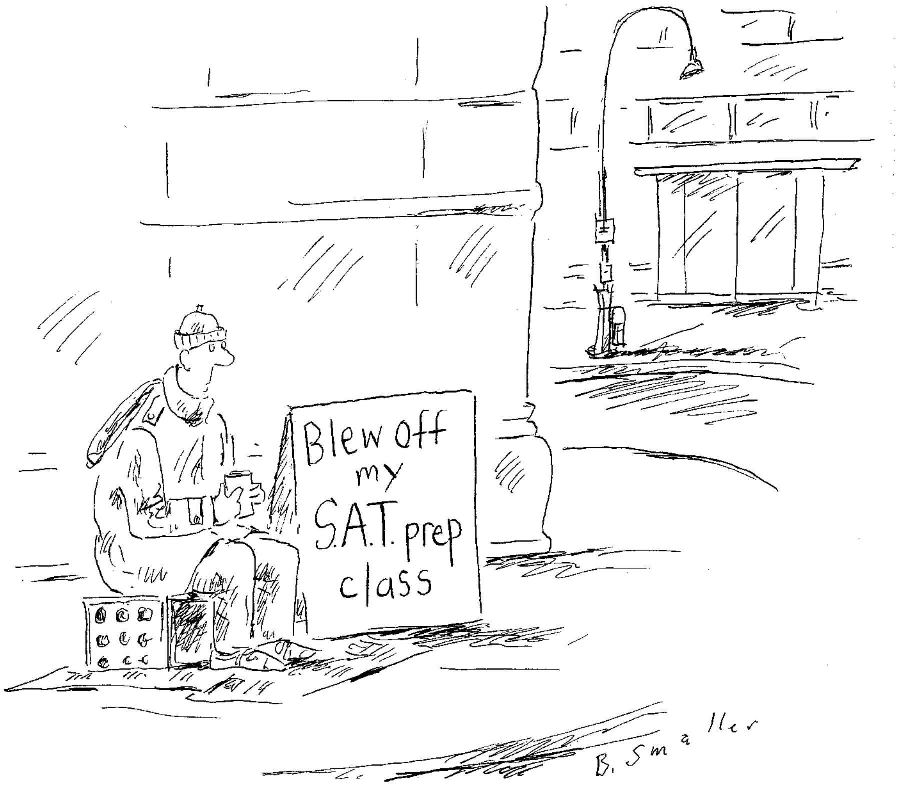
Nancy Franklin (On Television, p. 92) writes a regular column on television. ♦


Blew off my S.A.T. prep class
B. Smaller

THE MAIL

ARTICLE OF FEITH

The title of Jeffrey Goldberg's article about me alludes, I suppose, to the famous line "A little learning is a dangerous thing" ("A Little Learning," May 9th). This tickled me. As it happens, I spent a delightful portion of a recent vacation reading the Alexander Pope poem from which that line comes.

The poem, entitled "An Essay on Criticism," has advice both for those who do and for those who criticize. Pope tells the former to curb their pride ("So vast is art, so narrow human wit"), respect ancient wisdom, and eschew "false eloquence." As for critics, he warns:

> But you who seek to give and merit fame,
> And justly bear a critic's noble name,
> Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,
> How far your genius, taste, and learning go;
> Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,
> And mark that point where sense and dullness meet.

I have pondered your editors' choice of title. Were they sneering, or making a self-deprecatory joke? Are they familiar with the Pope poem, or only with the disembodied line? Did they shoot at me and catch the arrow in their own backside? A little learning can be a dangerous thing.
Douglas J. Feith
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Washington, D.C.

In his interview with Goldberg, Feith speaks of "starry-eyed Wilsonianism" and the folly of "taking the particulars of our political views and our institutions and trying to impose them in places where there is not fertile soil." His anxiousness to exempt present policy from past failures is understandable, but any implication that Wilson directly dictated the structures of European constitutions in the aftermath of the First World War would be a misrepresentation. The Weimar Constitution, for example, drew on a long tradition of German democratic thought. Theorists such as Hugo Preuss and Max Weber, who had a low opinion of the American spoils system, were instrumental in drafting a document considerably less oligarchic than the American Constitution: social insurance and the right to unionize were guaranteed, and a candidate with fewer votes than his opponent could never be levered into power, as George W. Bush was in 2000. Nor were the Eastern European centralized, parliamentary governments derived from American models. Still, Feith's implied parallel is pertinent in one respect: in Germany then, as in Iraq now, the perception that the new democratic regime was the instrument of a foreign power opened it to the charge of treason in a proud nationalist culture, and empowered its conservative rightist enemies.
Christine Mueller
Portland, Ore.

Feith confidently represents the current position in Afghanistan as a story of success built from the rubble of war. I do not think that those who work at N.G.O.s operating there would agree. There are few safe areas of the country outside certain heavily guarded neighborhoods in Kabul. The rest of the country has been ceded to the control of warlords who are quickly remaking the nation into a narco-state—opium cultivation is at an all-time high. The Taliban are reappearing in many areas. The rebuilding and creation of infrastructure is piecemeal and in many areas nonexistent. That Feith and the rest of the Bush Administration can view these failures as successes shows how far their views deviate from the facts on the ground and from any rational analysis of the problems that the citizens of Afghanistan confront daily.
Julian Miller
New York City

•

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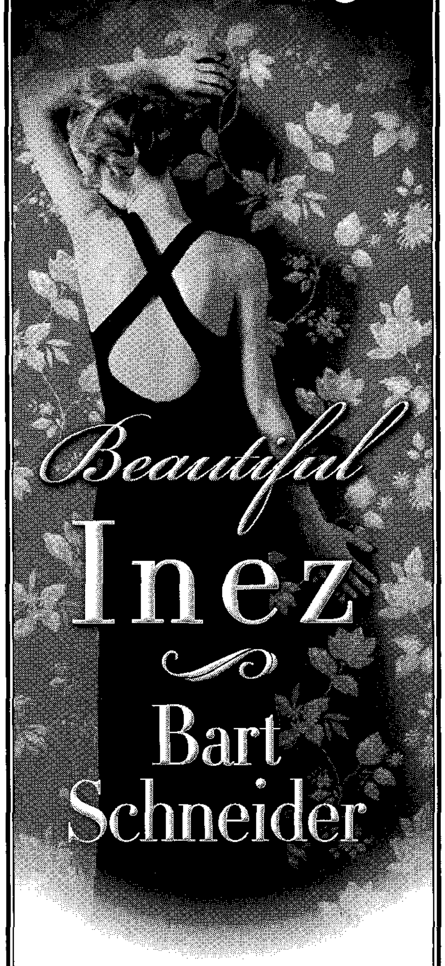
"Amazing."[1]
"Risk-taking."[2]
"Resounding."[3]



"Amazing ... *Beautiful Inez* is hard to get out of your system." —*Chicago Tribune*[1]

"A memorable, risk-taking novel that gets the people, the time, and the place just right." —Janet Fitch, author of *White Oleander*[2]

"A brave novel and a resounding success." —*Booklist* (starred review)[3]

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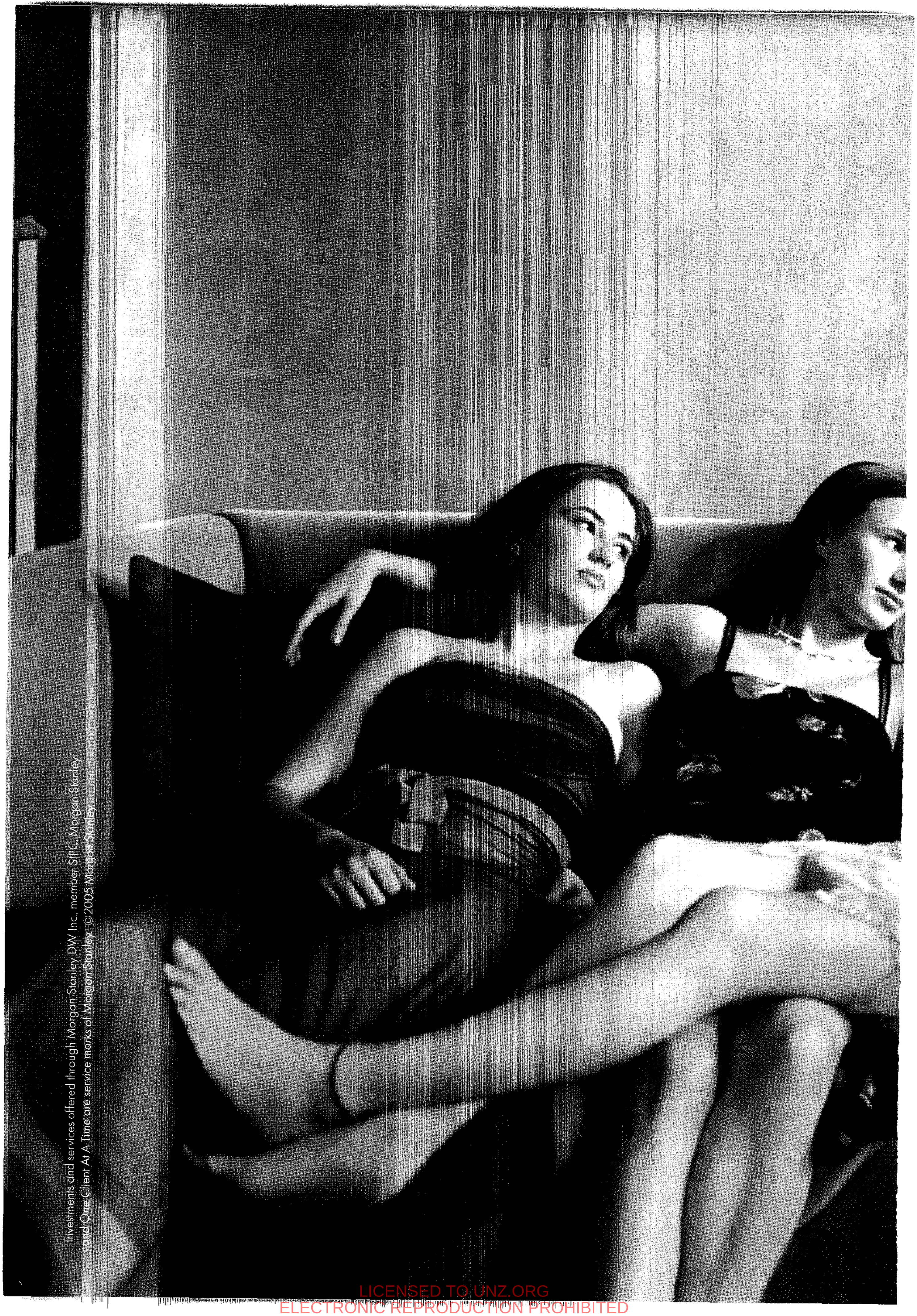

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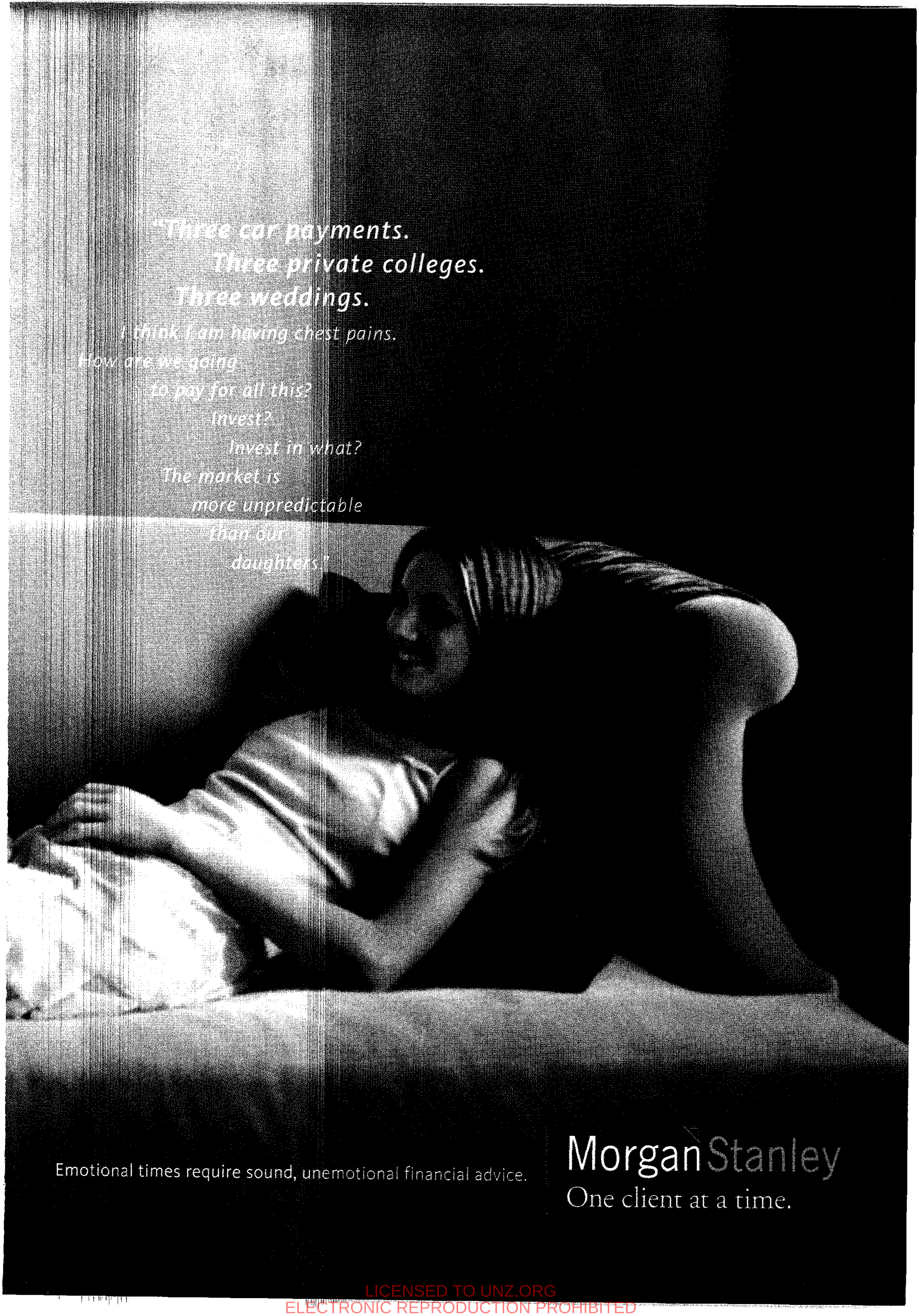

"Three car payments.
Three private colleges.
Three weddings.
I think I am having chest pains.
How are we going
to pay for all this?
Invest?
Invest in what?
The market is
more unpredictable
than our
daughters."

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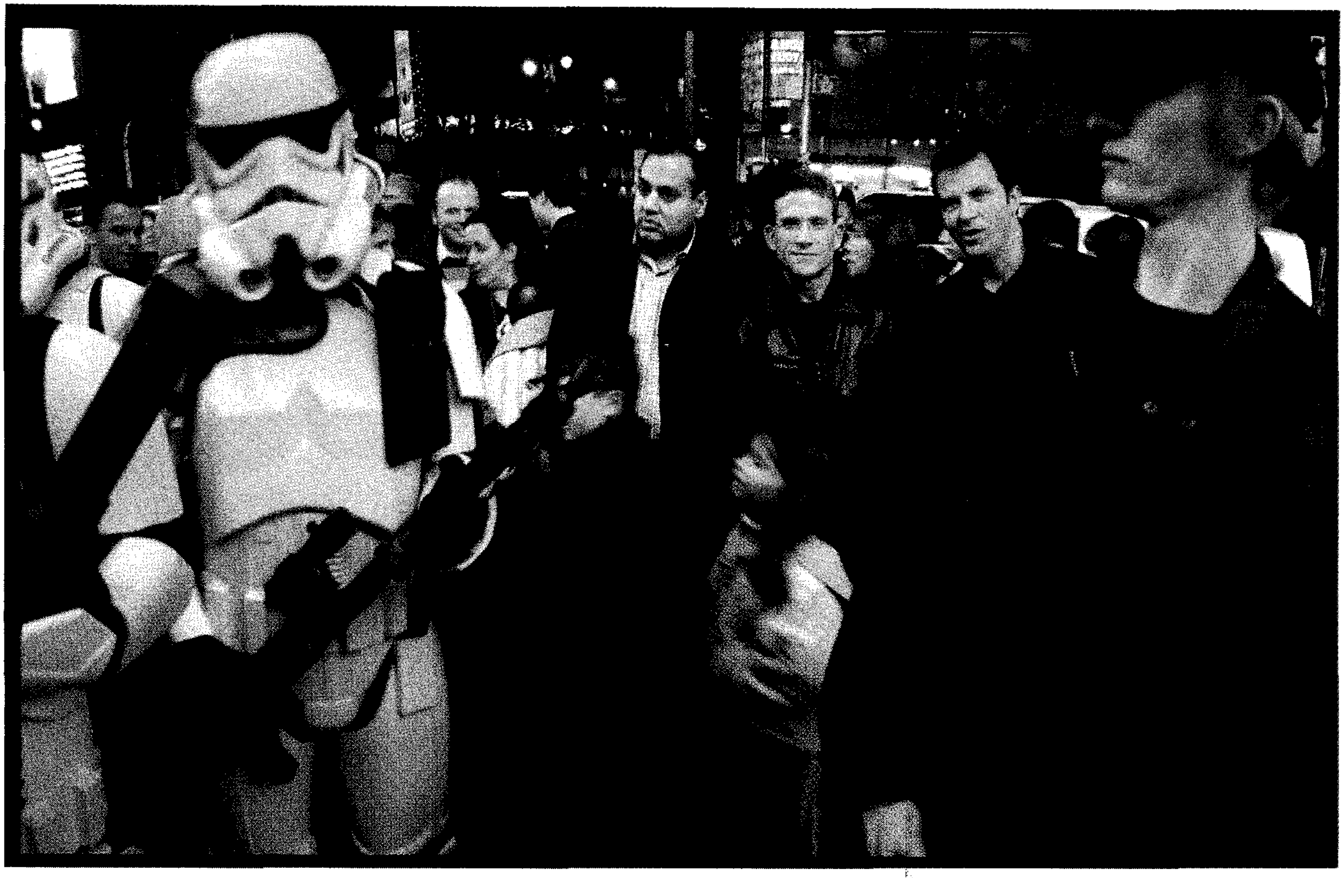

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
22	23	24	18	19	20	21

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
"BOOZY"

A musical by the innovative company Les Frères Corbusier that takes a hilariously incisive look at the history of urban planning; the characters include Robert Moses, Le Corbusier, and Jane Jacobs. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
HEARTLESS BASTARDS

The big rock act of the week is U2, which will play two nights at the Continental Airlines Arena and one night at Madison Square Garden, but the biggest sound of the week may belong to the Heartless Bastards, a Cincinnati-based trio led by the petite powerhouse Erika Wennerstrom. The group, which will be at Mercury Lounge on May 18, delivers a bruising brand of blues-rock located midway between the White Stripes and Janis Joplin. (See page 16.)

ART
RETHINKING COLLAGE

The versatility and the historical importance of collage are both in evidence in an exhibition now at the Pavel Zoubok gallery; the artists include Joseph Cornell, Jacques Prévert, Robert Motherwell, Doug and Mike Starn, and Antonio Puleo. (See page 20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
TONY CONRAD

Conrad, a violinist and filmmaker, has long been a fixture on the city's minimalist scene; back in 1962, he worked on La Monte Young's "Dream Music" with some of the city's most renowned musicians, including the future Velvet Underground member John Cale. Beginning in the mid-sixties, he focussed mostly on film; this week, he sets up in the Kitchen for performances of his compositions "Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain" and "Quadranga," as well as screenings of his videos. (See page 22.)

READINGS AND TALKS
"NYRB CLASSICS"

The book-publishing arm of *The New York Review of Books* celebrates its hundred-and-fiftieth title with a reading featuring Jonathan Lethem and Deborah Eisenberg. (See page 27.)

"Star Wars" fans lined up outside Toys R Us in Times Square earlier this month. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

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...it makes a beautifully balanced vodka tonic.
— Bon Appetit, July 2004

...it's satiny and citrusy.
— Men's Journal, June 2004

...drinking excellence. Go on, fill that jelly glass.
— Vibe, April 2004

Tops with our testers who declared it smooth...
— U.S. News & World Report, May 3, 2004

A superb unflavored vodka that's going to turn lots of heads.
— Wine Enthusiast, Dec. 31, 2004

Move over Grey Goose, there's a new super-premium vodka on the block—Level™ vodka.
— Simply the Best, November/December 2004

Thick and ripe, it flows across the palate... a hauntingly delicious finish.
— Robb Report, June 2004

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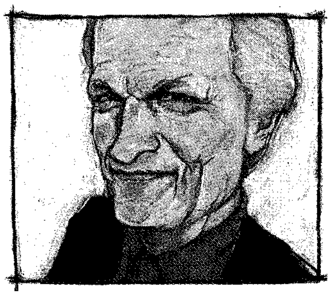
CONVERSATION
MACHINE DREAMS

Although Alan Alda has never been away—he can be seen on TV almost daily in "M*A*S*H" reruns—he has managed, as he approaches seventy, something of an artistic return. Last year, as the craven Senator Brewster in "The Aviator," he earned an Oscar nomination; this year, as Shelly (the Machine) Levene in David Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross," he received a Tony nod. "What's hard about acting Mamet's writing is that there are so many levels of pleasure that you get from it that are independent of one another," Alda said. "The story is one layer. The humor of people who don't know they're funny is another. And while all this is going on you can just listen to the rhythm. The unconscious is darting left and right in Mamet's talk. All of the repetitions and half-spoken thoughts add up to a clear direction. Nobody can come in and just do their part. It's a string septet. Just as a chamber-music group will give an entirely different show from night to night, the play comes out with different colors and flavors each time. It's exciting to stay within its technical limits and still find a whole universe of difference."

—*John Lahr*



N. ASCENCIOS

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AFTER THE NIGHT AND THE MUSIC
A new work by Elaine May, about life in this millennium, stars Jeanne Berlin and J. Smith-Cameron. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

B.F.E.
Julia Cho's new play, about a dysfunctional Asian-American family, is the season closer for Playwrights Horizons. Directed by Gordon Edelstein. Previews begin May 19. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DRESS SUITS TO HIRE
This collaboration between Holly Hughes, Peggy Shaw, and Lois Weaver from 1987 is being remounted at La Mama in honor of the Split Britches company's twenty-fifth anniversary. Opens May 19 at 7:30. (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

HOWIE THE ROOKIE
John O'Callaghan and Mark Byrne star in a play by Mark O'Rowe, set in Dublin. Directed by Nancy Malone. Opens May 18 at 8. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-868-4444.)

IVANOV
Chekhov's play about a widower who tries to find love with a younger woman is staged by the National Asian-American Theatre Company. Jonathan Bank directs. Previews begin May 20. Opens May 23 at 7. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, Lexington Ave. at 23rd St. 646-312-4085.)

KNOCK ON WOOD
The Israeli actor and writer Samuel Calderon brings his one-man play about his experiences as a soldier in the Yom Kippur War to New York. Previews begin May 17. Opens May 21 at 7. (13th Street Repertory, 50 W. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

MISS JULIE
A new adaptation of the Strindberg play, by Craig Lucas ("The Light in the Piazza," "Reckless"), is based on a translation by Anders Cato, who directs. With Marin Hinkle, Reg Rogers, and Julia Gibson. One preview on May 18. Opens May 19 at 8. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THE PARIS LETTER
A Wall Street macher is dogged by secrets from his past, in the New York première of a play by Jon Robin Baitz, presented by the Roundabout Theatre Company. John Glover, Michele Pawk, and Ron Rifkin lead the cast. Directed by Doug Hughes. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

TERRORISM
Elizabeth Marvel stars in the American première of a dark comedy by Vladimir and Oleg Presnyakov about the psychic burden imposed by the fear of terrorism. The show, a hit in Moscow, is a co-production of the New Group and the Play Company and is directed by Will Frears. In previews. Opens May 23 at 8. (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THRILL ME: THE LEOPOLD & LOEB STORY
The York Theatre presents a new musical by Stephen Dolginoff, about the erotic friendship between two rich young Chicago men that led to a brutal murder in 1924, prompting the "trial of the century." In previews. (Saint Peter's Church at Citigroup, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

WORK
A farce about corporate America by Charlotte Meehan, directed by Jim Simpson. Previews begin May 19. (The Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

ALTAR BOYZ
In this lampoon of the boy-band phenomenon, the lyricist-songwriters Gary Adler and Michael Patrick Walker hit below the belt without being vulgar in MTV-ready songs with infectious beats and witty lyrics. The spoofy synchronized break dancing, choreographed by Christopher Gattelli, would be funny even without the merciless score. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

BOOZY
In Les Frères Corbusier's high-concept, century-hopping musical about urban planning, diagrams of zoning plats and video clips of public projects vie for the audience's attention along with lusty dead-pan citizen choruses. As the singers and other players shed light and derision on doomed efforts to shape the modern city, they bat around inside jokes about every civic schemer from Fourier and Robert Moses to Goebbels and Mussolini. With Jake Grigolia as Moses, Daniel Larlham as Le Corbusier, and Nina Hellman as both the neighborhood activist Jane Jacobs and the (putative) mistress of Le Corbusier. Directed, with fever and ague, by Alex Timbers. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

DRUMSTRUCK
An interactive spectacle that provides each audience member with a two-foot-tall drum comes to Dodger Stages from South Africa, where it originated in a Johannesburg café nearly a decade ago. Directed by David Warren. (340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

FLIGHT
The eventful and controversial life of Charles Lindbergh is the subject of a new play by Garth Wingfield, presented by the Melting Pot Theatre Company. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS
Joe Mantello directs a pitch-perfect revival of David Mamet's majestic play about a group of Chicago real-estate brokers who fight to get the leads, get ahead of each other, close the sale, and get on the board. It's a sort of three-card monte of verbal manipulation, in which words are decoys of self-interest that connect the speakers to nothing but their own craven desire. From the first beat of this production, the play swings; the virtuoso cast—Alan Alda, Liev Schreiber, Gordon Clapp, Jeffrey Tambor, Frederick Weller, Tom Wopat, Jordan Lage—sends it solid. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/9/05.) (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

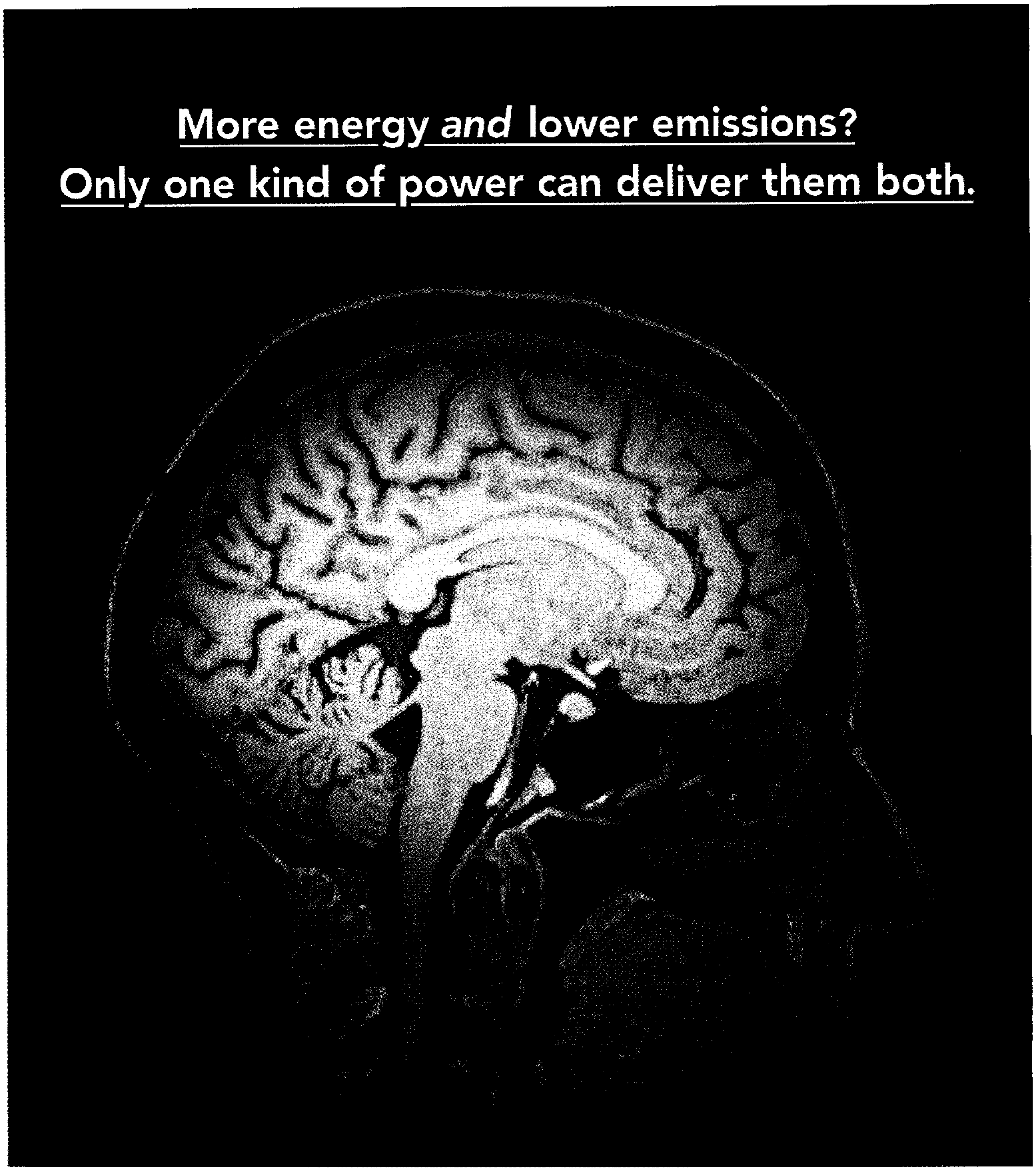
THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA
This lovely and complicated musical by Craig Lucas (book) and Adam Guettel (music and lyrics) is based on Elizabeth Spencer's novella about a Southern lady who takes Clara, her beautiful but intellectually impaired daughter, to Florence, where she stumbles into a love affair. Clara is played by the clear-voiced Kelli O'Hara with just the right mix of guilelessness and passion; Victoria Clark, a genteel powerhouse, plays her mother, who struggles with her conscience as her daughter fights for her right to love. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

MEMORY HOUSE
Dianne Wiest stars in a new play by Kathleen Tolan, about a woman whose college-bound adopted daughter confronts her about the ethics of international adoption. David Esbjornson directs. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PASSION OF THE CRAWFORD
In her latest glam-o-rama, Lypsinka (a.k.a. John Epperson) pays biting homage to Joan Crawford, the screen icon and exemplar of feral maternal instinct. Using a recording of Crawford's 1973 interview at Town Hall, along with other sound clips, Lypsinka whips the star's famous temper into a froth of bitchy fun. (Zipper Theatre, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.)

SCORE
In her latest SITI Company concoction, Anne Bogart explores the creative act by way of Leonard Bernstein, whom she paints as the ultimate razzle-dazzler. Tom Nelis's Bernstein is deeply schmaltzy—he exclaims "Life is juicy!" more than once and seems to mean it. But the maestro's endless capacity for self-celebration can also be exhausting and dramatically static. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. Through June 5.)

SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER
In Oliver Goldsmith's eighteenth-century comedy, a young Londoner (Brian Hutchison) mistakes his country-squire host, Mr. Hardcastle (the excellent Remak Ramsay), for an innkeeper and, accordingly, treats his daughter, Kate (Danielle Ferland), like a pert barmaid. The director, Charlotte Moore, has tacked on an awkward prologue, but amusing performances by Ramsay, Patricia O'Connell (as Mr. Hardcastle's wife), and Tim Smallwood, as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Lumpkin, their bumptious but clever son, preserve the neatness of the satire. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
In this revival of Tennessee Williams's masterpiece, the British director Edward Hall has cast Stanley against type, as a lumpen lout, in order to shed the iconic aura of Marlon Brando. "Be comfortable. That's my motto," the expert John C. Reilly, as Stanley, says to Blanche (Natasha Richardson) at their first meeting. The problem is that Reilly, who has a pushed-in face and a strapping, soft body, is not particularly comfortable in his own flesh. In changing the essential nature of the character, Hall lowers the stakes and throws the play weirdly off-kilter. (5/9/05) (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

SUMMERWORKS 2005
The Clubbed Thumb theatre company's annual festival runs through May 28. Now appearing is "Madame Killer," a gothic noir by Honour Kane. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

SWEET CHARITY
Neil Simon's sanitized musical version of Fellini's "Nights of Cabiria," asks the question, Can a dance-hall hostess with a heart of gold, great legs, and nine songs find true love? The answer, evidently, is no. In the course of this noisy evening, Charity (Christina Applegate) is trapped in a pond, a closet, a dance hall, an elevator, and a Ferris wheel. Everything happens to her; nothing happens to us. Applegate, making her Broadway début, has megawatt buoyancy and is bona-fide adorable, and the splendid Denis O'Hare gives Simon's lacklustre book an eccentric wallop, too; his neurotic Oscar Lindquist, who loves and then leaves the tart with a heart, is at once vivid and poignant. Still, apart from the numbers "Big Spender" and "If My Friends Could See Me Now," the show's score and lyrics are just glib, a defect the director, Walter Bobbie, covers up by keeping the amperage high and the cleavage low. (5/16/05) (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE
William Finn and Rachel Sheinkin's satisfying and silly musical comedy has moved to Broadway. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

ALL SHOOK UP: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **ALL WEAR BOWLERS:** HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-868-4444. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BEAST ON THE MOON:** Century Center for the Performing Arts, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **BRITS OFF BROADWAY:** 59E59 Theatre, 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100. **DESSA ROSE:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE GLASS MENAGERIE:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HURLYBURLY:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **JULIUS CAESAR:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **LITTLE WOMEN:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NINE PARTS OF DESIRE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. (Closes May 22.) **ON GOLDEN POND:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **A PICASSO:** City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **THE PILLOWMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **STEEL MAGNOLIAS:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **TWELVE ANGRY MEN:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **WOMAN BEFORE A GLASS:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—May 22-23: The onetime chart-topper **Billy Idol,** ignoring the gray beneath the peroxide and the failure of his last major release, 1993's "Cyberpunk," is back with a new record, "Devil's Playground." His signature sneer remains intact.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 18: **Doc Watson,** one of the most important fingerpicking stylists of all time. With his grandson **Richard Watson** on guitar and his longtime friend and collaborator **David Holt,** a clawhammer-banjo virtuoso. May 21: The **U.S. Air Guitar Championships New York City Regional.** In Oulu, Finland, for the past nine years, judges have given the private obsession of teen-agers a chance at legitimacy. The United States air-guitar finals are in Los Angeles next month, but the last two world champions, Miri (Sonyk-Rok) Park and David (C-Diddy) Jung, came from New York City.

CONTINENTAL AIRLINES ARENA
East Rutherford, New Jersey (212-307-7171)—May 17-18: **U2,** which recently regained its messianic stride after years in the wilderness of irony. When not cavorting with popes and treasury secretaries, Bono and company are renowned for blistering live shows, and the current Vertigo tour is no exception.

The Czech outfit the Plastic People of the Universe plays Joe's Pub on May 22.

HIRO BALLROOM
The Maritime Hotel, 363 W. 16th St. (212-242-4300)—The third annual **New York Burlesque Festival** is a three-day affair, with events at Southpaw, in Brooklyn, on May 20, and a cruise aboard the Queen of Hearts Showboat on May 22, but the main event, on May 21, has some forty uninhibited acts from across North America, including traditional striptease performers, risqué dance troupes, and raucous bands. (For more information, visit www.thenewyorkburlesquefestival.com.)

THE HOOK
18 Commerce St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-797-3007)—May 20: The British band **Psychic TV,** born out of the rubble of the seventies industrial-music pioneers Throbbing Gristle, has gone through dozens of lineup and stylistic changes in its two-decade history, but its one constant has been its protean leader, Genesis P-Orridge.

HOUSING WORKS USED BOOK CAFÉ
126 Crosby St. (212-334-3324)—May 20: The winning acoustic-music series "Live from Home" continues with **Glenn Tilbrook,** formerly of Squeeze, and the gritty singer-songwriter **Shannon McNally.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 21: The **Asylum Street Spankers,** a free-spirited collective of acoustic-blues-loving musicians out of Austin, Texas. May 22: Formed in 1968 following the Soviet invasion of Prague, the **Plastic People of the Universe** have endured everything from censorship to harassment to imprisonment. The Czech band quickly became a symbol of Eastern European dissidence and gained a huge cult following for its wildly original, darkly atmospheric songs, which blend psychedelic punk with free jazz, amid a frenzy of violins. The **Mingus Orchestra** is here Thursdays, with sets at 11:30 and 1:30 A.M.

LINCOLN CENTER'S GREAT PERFORMERS
Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—The Hoboken alternative-rock trio **Yo La Tengo** can make noise to rival a Force 10 gale or play as quietly as a summer breeze on a sheltered lagoon. On May 18, they'll accompany the poetic marine documentaries of the late experimental filmmaker Jean Painlevé.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—May 21: **U2** (see Continental Airlines Arena). May 24: **Sarah McLachlan.** After a six-year hiatus, during which she lost her mother and gave birth to her daughter, the Canadian songstress is back with "Afterglow," an airy, ethereal folk-pop album full of pensive, haunting ballads. The **Perishers,** a Scandinavian indie-folk quartet, open.

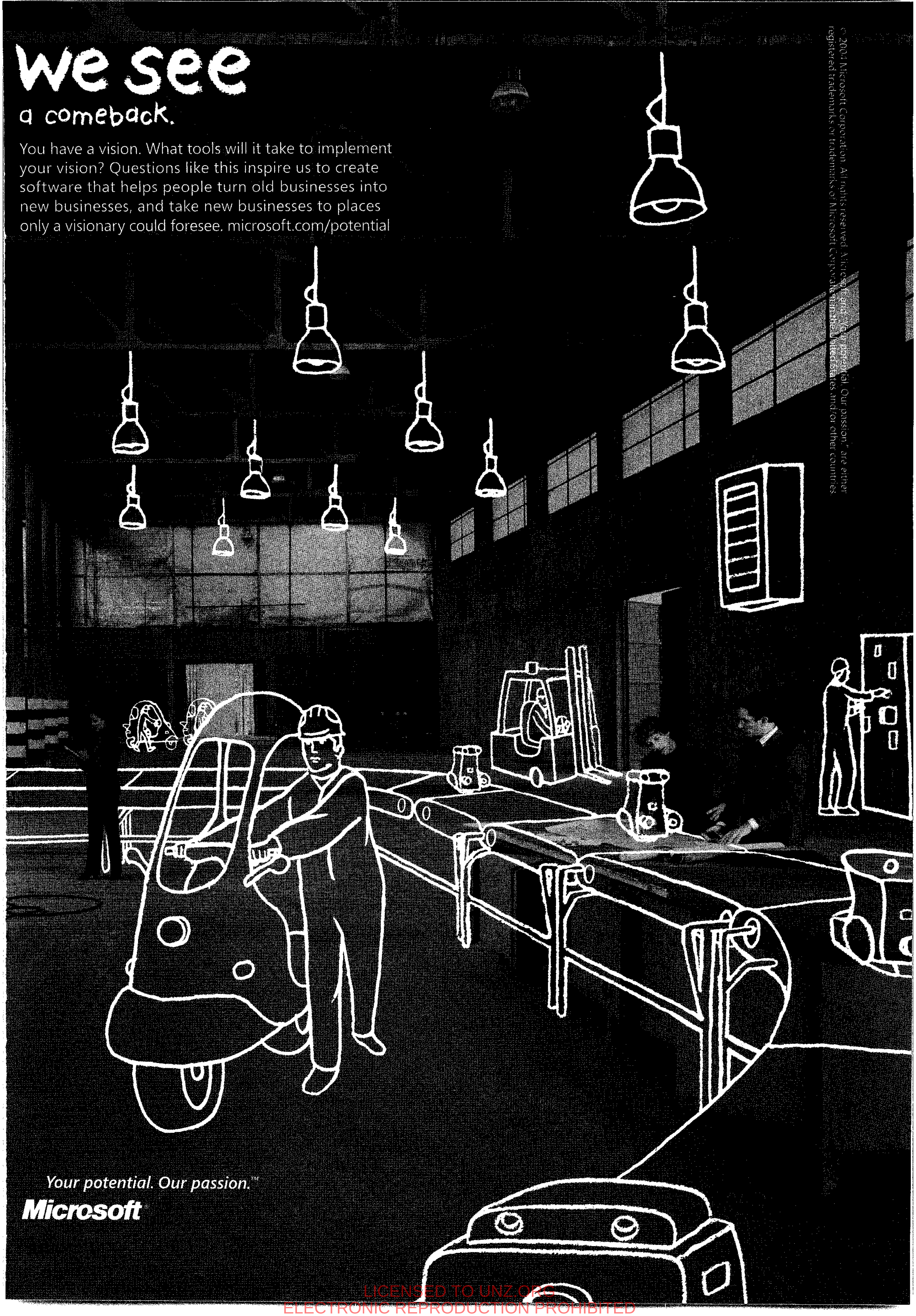
MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 18: The **Heartless Bastards.** Erika Wennerstrom, a petite woman with a cavernous voice, is bringing this high-voltage trio from the small clubs of its home town, Cincinnati, to the nation's big stages. The Bastards' début album, "Stairs and Elevators," on Fat Possum, is attracting warranted attention for its overpowering originals, which combine a raw, bluesy approach with unexpected lyrical flourishes. With **Pela,** an au-courant Brooklyn band. May 19: **Tarantula,** a quartet of violin, cello, bass, and drums, crafts noirish soundscapes. May 21-22: Led by Stereolab's Laetitia Sadier, **Monade** tinkers only slightly with the cool, cocktail-ready sound of Sadier's main outfit. With the **Zincs.** May 24: The **Perishers** (see Madison Square Garden).

RUMSEY PLAYFIELD
Central Park, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-307-7171)—May 22: The **Fountains of Wayne** send one out to Stacy's mom, in a benefit for homeless children. With **Ben Kweller.**

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—May 19: The soulful Detroit hip-hop act Platinum Pied Pipers is the producer Waajeed, a founding member of the group Slum Village, and the multi-instrumentalist Saadiq. Their début album, "Triple P," features their fellow Motor City musicians Jay Dee and MC Lacks.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—May 18: The mandolin virtuoso **David Grisman** plays his own style of music, which he calls "dawg" and which incorporates bluegrass picking, jazz, and Latin music. These days he's playing it with a new backing band, **Old School Freight Train,** a collection of young musicians from Charlottesville, Virginia. May 21: The **World Music Institute** celebrates its twentieth anniversary with a benefit concert featuring the tabla legend **Zakir Hussain,** the sarangi player **Ustad Sultan Khan,** the Latin percussionist **Giovanni Hidalgo,** the oud master **Simon Shaheen,** and many others. (For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—May 18-19: The lush emotive rock of the **Doves** and the romantic flourishes of **Mercury Rev.** May 20: The **Hot Hot Heat** burst onto the scene three years ago with an outstanding album of jerky New Wave music, "Make Up



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the Break Down." With the **Blue Van,** a Danish foursome with chiselled chins, mop tops, and a penchant for bluesy rock. May 21-25: **Bright Eyes.** Saddled with comparisons to every prominent songwriter from Bob Dylan to Kurt Cobain, the profoundly prolific Conor Oberst, the twenty-four-year old leader of this indie-rock outfit, has to contend with being labelled the next generational spokesperson. The **Faint,** an Omaha band that revives the New Wave sound of the early eighties with a dark vengeance, splits the bill.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 17-22: **Ben E. King.** This former Drifter and brilliant interpreter of Leiber and Stoller may be best known for "Spanish Harlem" and "Stand by Me," but he's just as comfortable with old-school jazz-inflected R. & B.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 17-22: The **Joe Lovano** quartet. On his new release, "Joyous Encounter," the magisterial saxophonist salutes the undervalued compositional talents of the late Thad Jones (see Jazz at Lincoln Center). Thad's brother, Hank, whose elegant piano enlivens the album, will be replaced here by the estimable **Mulgrew Miller.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through May 21: **Debby Boone** pays tribute to her late mother-in-law, Rosemary Clooney.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—The late flugelhornist, composer, and arranger Thad Jones co-led with Mel Lewis a big band that played every Monday night at the Village Vanguard from 1966 to 1979 (it lives on as the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra), but he remains overlooked. The **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra,** led by **Wynton Marsalis,** does its part to remedy that at the Rose Theatre on May 19-21, with the help of two key saxophonists from the Jones-Lewis ensemble—**Billy Harper** and **Jerry Dodgion.**

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Through May 29: The New Orleans piano man **Dr. John** goes solo.

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—May 20: The **Avishai Cohen Group.** There are indeed two Israeli jazz musicians named Avishai Cohen on the New York scene these days. One is a bassist who has worked with Chick Corea. This, though, is the trumpet-playing Cohen, a stinging improviser with a taste for both hard bop and left-of-center styles. May 21: The **John Blake, Jr., Group** explores fiddle music from Africa and America.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 19-20: **Doug Wamble** may play guitar and write and sing his own songs, but he's no run-of-the-mill singer-songwriter. This major talent is an authentic jazz musician with a taste for Southern blues and gospel, as well, as his new album, "Bluestate," demonstrates.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 19: The classical superstar **Renee Fleming** steps out with the pianist **Fred Hersch,** who helped, along with the guitarist Bill Frissell, fashion the singer's new album of familiar standards and pop tunes, "Haunted Heart," into an unexpected treat.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—**Bobby Hutcherson,** who translated the modernist grammar of sixties jazz onto the vibraphone, is here with his quartet May 17-22. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—**"Tony Oursler at the Met: 'Studio' and 'Climaxed,'"** is centered on a mixed-media installation that pays tribute to Gustave Courbet. Opens May 17. ♦ **"Diane Arbus: Revelations,"** an indeed revealing (though gratingly worshipful) retrospective, confirms Arbus's achievement as a revolutionary photographer. Through May 30. ♦ The Costume Institute's annual blockbuster is **"Chanel,"** a retrospective of designs from the couture house founded by Gabrielle Chanel (1883-1971), better known as Coco. Through Aug. 7. ♦ **"John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker"** presents a few dozen pieces by a prominent early American furniture-maker alongside additional work by his contemporaries. Townsend was the star of a clan of Quaker furniture-makers who broke up plain patterns with undulating fronts, handsome inlays, and shell carvings, resulting in one of the first distinctive American schools of design. The furniture styles evolved with the republic: the curved cabriole legs of the Colonial era gave way to straight legs relieved by stop-fluted decoration in the years after Newport was occupied by the British (1777-79), which then evolved into the geometrically strict Federal styles of the seventeen-eighties. Upended leaf tables and bureaus reveal exacting craftsmanship, and receipts and account books provide historical context. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt on the Roof: Splotches, Whirls, and Twirls."** A summer installation in the roof garden of five spiky stalagmite sculptures and a wall drawing. Through Oct. 30. ♦ **"Max Ernst: A Retrospective."** Some hundred and eighty paintings, drawings, sculptures, collages, and illustrated books by the restlessly creative artist (1891-1976). Through July 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"The High Line"** details Field Operations and Diller Scofidio & Renfro's ambitious urban rails-to-trails scheme for the abandoned elevated tracks that run along the West Side from Gansevoort to Thirty-fourth Street. Through Oct. 31. ♦ **"Thomas Demand."** The German artist's crisp photographs of cut-and-glued, life-size mockups of unpeopled environments suggest that, like photographs, our assumptions about reality are paper thin. Through May 30. ♦ Chris Marker's **"Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men,"** a nineteen-minute looped video installation invoking T. S. Eliot and the First World War, is on display in the Morita media gallery. Through June 13. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

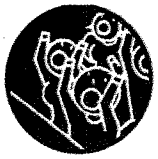
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Art of Tomorrow: Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim"** is an exhibition devoted to the museum's first curator and director, who was also an artist herself. Opens May 20. ♦ **"The Eye of the Storm: Works in Situ by Daniel Buren."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Recent Acquisitions: Slater Bradley's 'Doppelganger Trilogy' "** gathers three of the artist's recent videos, for which he staged utterly convincing faux performances by Kurt Cobain, Michael Jackson, and Ian Curtis. Through May 22. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Tim Hawkinson,"** a mid-career retrospective of the California artist's diverse inventions, including the football-field-size "Überorgan," an automated bagpipe housed in the sculpture garden at 590 Madison Avenue, at Fifty-seventh Street. Through May 29. ♦ **"Prints Into Drawings,"** a roomful of prints made in the last fifty years assembled to illustrate the shared techniques of drawing and printmaking. Through Aug. 1. ♦ **"Set Up: Recent Acquisitions in Photography."** Through June 26. ♦ **"Landscape,"** an idiosyncratic collection of pieces from the permanent collection. Through Sept. 18. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Basquiat"** is an important, intensely enjoyable retrospective of the neo-expressionist, who died in 1988, at the age of twenty-seven. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India,"** a dual-venue show

POP NOTES
SINGLES GOING STEADY



Missy Elliott's sixth album, "The Cookbook," is due out on June 28, and for the first time the majority of her songs have not been produced by her long-time collaborator Timbaland. Rather, she has enlisted his main rivals, the Neptunes, to produce a single for her, and they have created a delightfully evil, clomping tune called **"On and On,"** which is currently streaming on her Web site, along with a song produced by Elliott herself, **"Lose Control."** The basis for "Lose Control" is a long sample from a 1983 song called "Clear," a deeply syncopated piece of electronic dance music originally released by Juan Atkins and Richard Davis under the name Cybotron. Elliott cannily drafted the R. & B. singer of the moment, Ciara, to perform on the track, but "Lose Control" is wonderful largely because of the past: the song's airy weirdness and propulsion come from a web of drum machines and keyboards that is now more than twenty years old.

If the eighties revival must continue, please let British producer Richard X be in charge. While his lessers mine dance rock that wasn't so hot the first time around, he has channelled the effervescence of one-hit wonders, such as Nu Shooz ("I Can't Wait") for **"Chewing Gum,"** a song on the Norwegian singer Annie's fizzy début, "Anniemal." Annie's voice is pure Kewpie doll, all head and breath, so she needs a distinct style and a strong conceit. Inspired by a put-down that Richard X's girlfriend invented for people with an inflated sense of their own attractiveness, the song has twinkling keyboards and a perfectly carefree metaphor—boys who think they're chocolate are really just chewing gum (as in bedpost, sidewalk, movie-theatre seats): "You spit it out when all the flavor has gone / Wrap him round your finger like you're playing with gum."

Anti-poppists will have a hard time holding the line against the former American Idol Kelly Clarkson, who currently has the best rock song on the charts. The songwriter Lukasz Gottwald's demo of **"Since U Been Gone,"** a fervent confession of relief after a breakup gone right ("Since you've been gone, I can breathe for the first time"), struck Clarkson as too wimpy, so she demanded more guitars and louder drums. She got them, and you can hear them—and Clarkson—from blocks away. The song, like many pop songs performed by young women right now, is an anthem that preaches the benefits of self-knowledge and emotional independence; in this case, it seems to be fulfilling its own prophecy.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

with the Queens Museum that takes the pulse of the contemporary art scene in the world's largest democracy. Through June 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—"Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture." Through July 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Wild Things: The Art of Maurice Sendak."** Through Aug. 14. ♦ **"The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons."** Through July 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Greater New York 2005"** collects work by more than a hundred and sixty artists from around the city who have emerged in the past five years. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows–Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India,"** a dual-venue show with the Asia Society. Through June 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

EDWARD HOPPER
Twenty-two drawings, many of them rough sketches for iconic paintings. Through May 31. (Peter Findlay, 41 E. 57th St. 212-644-4433.)

"ANDRÉ KERTÉSZ AND THE PARIS AVANT-GARDE"
Kertész gets top billing here because of his current retrospective at the National Gallery, but he's got serious competition (and brilliant support) from his contemporaries of the twenties and thirties, including Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Lartigue, Atget, Brassaï, Ilse Bing, and Germaine Krull, all represented by superb vintage prints. Paris and its citizens (frequently the artists themselves or their immediate circle) provide the exhibition's motif, but Dora Maar's unsentimental portrait of a blind beggar in Barcelona, a dish in his hand and bulky burlap sack cradled in his arms, helps put this small world in perspective. Through June 4. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070.)

"HOMESTYLE"
Tom Sachs's "Bong Hit Station," one of the domestic comforts presented in this small show, exceeds any homey fantasies fostered by the Sharper Image catalogue or by Martha Stewart. A gimcrack construction of scrap wood, it includes not only a bong and water but a Budweiser can, Marlboros, a mirror, a clock, and a radio-controlled toy car. Unfortunately, none of the other items in the show—by Jeff Koons, Yayoi Kusama, Roy Lichtenstein, and Edward Ruscha—tweak private coziness with comparable force. Through May 27. (Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470.)

"OUT OF PLACE"
Corporate lobbies are not naturally friendly environments for art, a fact acknowledged in the title of this group show. Organized by the pioneering Williamsburg gallery Momenta Art—an unlikely partner for the UBS conglomerate—the show does surprisingly well in context. Anne Daems's photographs of midtown plazas mix whimsy with sterility, while Jennifer Bolande's sculpture replicates in miniature the high-modernist Lever House. James Mills crams a huge bookshelf with pulpy paperbacks, their spines turned in to tease idlers' fantasies. Also included are works by Craig Kalpakjian, Louise Lawler, and Dan Graham. Through June 17. (UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-713-2885.)

Short List

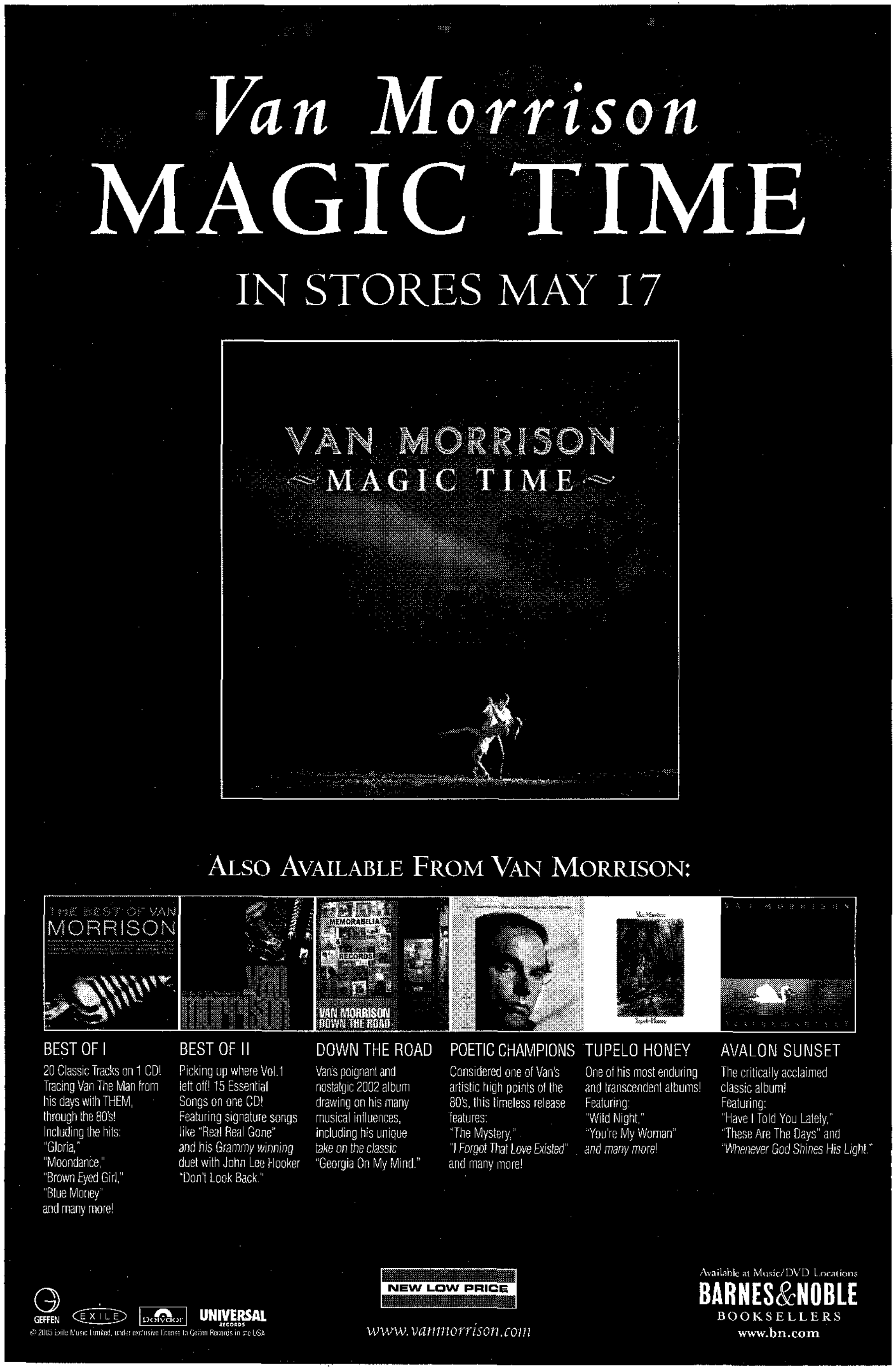
HUBERTUS GOJOWCZYK: Moeller, 167 E. 73rd St. 212-988-4500. Through June 24. **JULIAN SCHNABEL:** C&M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through June 4. **WAYNE THIEBAUD:** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 212-987-4997. Through May 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

UTA BARTH
Though far more engaged with sensual phenomena than with theoretical polemic, Barth's photographs have always been about the nature of perception. In much of her previous work, she removed all subjects and left the viewer with pure, abstract ambience. In her new pictures—a series of small flower arrangements on her own otherwise bare desktop—the subject returns, but its aura remains key to the work's seductive effect. Although Barth flirts with decorativeness more blatantly than ever, her restraint keeps things cool, even in a number of red-orange "after-images" that spark and steal the show. Through June 18. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

AMY GARTRELL
Gartrell is part of the wave of young artists who reject paint and canvas in favor of grade-school art supplies like markers, felt, and fluorescent paper. Her subjects are taken from childhood, too—specifically, from a rediscovered box of her junior-high possessions, which are the basis for drawings and banners reminiscent of sixties psychedelic posters. Some are funny, like the "Subliminal Mirror" series, in which graphite surfaces conceal sour-grapes texts like "I did not want to go to their stupid party anyway." Others blur the line between the hip, the bratty, and the excessively, adolescently banal. Through May 27. (Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949.)

ROBYN O'NEIL
Romantic motifs pervade these large-scale graphite drawings by an artist who gained notice in last year's Whitney Biennial. "As Darkness Falls on This



Van Morrison
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Heartless Land, My Brother Holds Tight My Feeble Hand," reads one title, while another drawing wails, "Oh, How the Heartless Haunt Us All." Wolves, owls, and craggy pine trees are scattered around the otherwise barren landscapes; tiny men huddle in groups or stand alone, existential ciphers in the wilderness. Many of the works are constructed like altarpieces but religion seems a distant concern, unless you count the neo-Romantic preference for deep feeling over "heartless" thought. Through May 21. (Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-5937.)

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO
"Art is possible without artistic intention and can be better without it," Sugimoto writes about the subjects of his new still-life series, mathematical and mechanical forms made mostly in the late nineteenth century as models for students. Shot at close range and reproduced in typically monumental scale, these forms are rendered as elegant readymades in the Duchampian mode—icons of the intellect. Sugimoto nods to Arp, Picabia, and Brancusi, appropriate for work that is as glamorous as it is cerebral: his lighting, with its velvety shadows, would flatter a movie star. Through June 25. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

"The Matador, 2004," by Tina Barney, at Borden.

"COLLAGE: SIGNS & SURFACES"
An astonishing seventy-seven artists are included in this tightly hung tour of twentieth-century collage, among them sages like Joseph Cornell, Jacques Prévert, and Lee Krasner and younger artists like Javier Piñón, Doug and Mike Starn, and Antonio Puleo. Through May 21. (Zoubok, 533 W. 23rd St. 212-675-7490.)

Short List

TIM GARDNER: 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through May 28. **JASPER JOHNS:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through June 25. **MALCOLM MORLEY:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through June 25. **RICHARD PRINCE:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through June 18. **NEO RAUCH:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through June 18.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

MARK HANDFORTH
Handforth's motley lineage isn't hard to divine. The white and lavender fluorescent lights of "All Star" look like a Dan Flavin reshuffled into a neo-Pop confection; the bent aluminum rods and beams of "Northern Star" suggest an angular Frank Stella or a hollow David Smith and summon Handforth's earlier bent-lamppost sculptures. His less referential displays are delicate and poetic, like "Weeping Willow," an empty phone-booth box hung crookedly on the wall, dripping a rainbow of candle wax, and "Slow," a giant, reflective orange traffic sign bent inward, as if to give the viewer a consoling hug. Through May 21. (Gavin Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258.)

NASREEN MOHAMEDI
In conjunction with its exhibition of visionary abstractions by Agnes Martin, Emma Kunz, and Hilma af Klint, the Drawing Center's annex presents photographs and works on paper by Mohamedi (1937-90), an Indian artist rarely shown in this country. Mohamedi's geometries are minimal and precise. A series of pencil-on-graph-paper images investigate minute differences in scale and value produced by different densities of line, while her black-and-white photographs examine abstracted fields—the threads in a loom, paving stones in a public square. It's a lyrical modernism in extremely pared-down terms. Through May 21. (Drawing Room, 40 Wooster St. 212-219-2166.)

"AFTERALL"
The art journal *Afterall* presents its seventh issue as a small show focussed on gothic introspection and lush color. Glamorous digital psychedelics by Jeremy Blake, some attractively tawdry collages by Jutta Koether, Richard Wright's silver enamel painting on vinyl panels, and a series of UltraChrome photographs by Kenneth Anger are accompanied by neo-retro twang from the Handsome Family and authentic old-school twang from Harry Smith's "Anthology of American Folk Music," both on hand at listening stations. It's not clear that the project will meet its stated goal of counteracting political apathy, but it is fun. Through May 21. (Apex Art, 291 Church St. 212-431-5270.)

Short List

TINA BARNEY: Borden, 560 Broadway. 212-431-0166. Through June 3. **ALBERTO CASADO:** Art in General, 79 Walker St. 212-219-0473. Through June 25. **"3X ABSTRACTION: NEW METHODS OF DRAWING BY HILMA AF KLINT, EMMA KUNZ, AND AGNES MARTIN":** Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166. Through May 21.

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

MEGAN FOSTER / TOM KOTIK
Rooms furnished with exercise bicycles, Xbox joysticks, and jumbled kitchen appliances turn out—surprise, surprise—to be pervaded by ennui in Foster's paintings. Her graphic vocabulary borrows from architectural drafting and advertising, while her palette of ice blues, browns, and oranges comes straight from contemporary product design. Kotik's outdoor sculpture fares better in the entertainment-is-imprisoning department. A nondescript booth is open on one side and seems to emit music; when you lift the handle on an equally plain bin inside, the volume rises, and another, smaller bin appears. Open that to release a deafening blast recorded by Kotik's band, Mighty High. Through June 6. (Black & White, 483 Driggs Ave. 718-599-8775.)

TREVOR WENTWORTH
Wentworth's paintings and fantasy-architectural sculptures allegedly have to do with the seventeenth-century naturalist Antoni van Leeuwenhoek and his experience of war between the Netherlands and England. This is not readily apparent in the work. But it is clear that microscopes and maps, and a biologist/cartographer's obsession with minute detail, preoccupy this artist. Elaborate paper constructions like modernist cities or colonies of paramecia share space with less successful digitally based paper cutouts, which lack the sculptures' finicky, giddy touch. Through May 30. (Plus Ultra, 235 S. 1st St. 718-387-3844.)

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
The company begins its spring season with four performances of "Don Quixote," each headlined by a star duo, beginning with Paloma Herrera and Angel Corella. Highlights of the next two months include the American première of Christopher Newton's staging of Frederick Ashton's "Sylvia," a one-week Fokine celebration, and nine performances of the swashbuckling "Le Corsaire." The gala opening, on May 23, features Alessandra Ferri and Julio Bocca in the pas de deux from Roland Petit's "Carmen," Herman Cornejo in his showstopping turn in "Le Spectre de la Rose," Julie Kent and Vladimir Malakhov in the pas de deux from Act II of "Swan Lake," and the New York company première of Fokine's "Polovtsian Dances." Savion Glover also presents a pièce d'occasion. ♦ May 23 at 6:30 (gala): "Le Spectre de la Rose," "Swan Lake Act II Pas de Deux," "Polovtsian Dances," "Pièce d'Occasion," "Carmen Pas de Deux," and "Don Quixote Suite." ♦ May 24 at 8: "Don Quixote." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Few plotless ballets delight audiences as much as Balanchine's "Jewels," which returns this week for four performances before being retired for several seasons. The production's lustrous sets and costumes, evoking emeralds (with the music of Fauré), rubies (with Stravinsky), and diamonds (with Tchaikovsky), magnify the thrill of seeing work created by Balanchine at the height of his powers. ♦ May 18 at 8 and May 22 at 3: "Jewels." ♦ May 19 at 8: "Ballo Della Regina," "Polyphonia," and "Glass Pieces." ♦ May 20 at 8: "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3" and "Musagète." ♦ May 21 at 2: "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," "Polyphonia," and "Glass Pieces." ♦ May 21 at 8: "Ballo Della Regina," "Double Aria," and "The Goldberg Variations." ♦ May 24 at 7:30 (an all-Robbins program): "The Goldberg Variations" and "Glass Pieces." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 26.)

MOMIX
In Moses Pendleton's new "Lunar Sea," which runs for the next two weeks during Momix's twenty-fifth-anniversary season at the Joyce, dancers are cast as extraterrestrial humanoids. Pendleton creates illusions so vivid they fool the senses—when a strange beast divides into two moving bodies, it comes as a

shock. With trick lighting, a New Age soundtrack, and dumbfounding stunts, the production bears a resemblance to an awesome halftime show, but the bursts of irony in Pendleton's conception and the pure lines of his dancers elevate the work beyond mere entertainment. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 17-20 at 8, May 21 at 2 and 8, and May 22 at 2 and 7:30. Through May 29.)

"NETRO"

The Israeli-born choreographer Neta Pulvermacher and her Neta Dance Company celebrate her eclectic, spirited repertory in a retrospective that covers twenty years of work. Program B, in the second week, features the playful solo "River of Orchids" (1999), set to a plinking score by XTC, in which Isadora Wolfe, in metallic green taffeta and springy feelers, evokes a zippy water bug, and also includes "Goodbye and Good Luck" (1994/2001), named for a Grace Paley story about a fading star of the Yiddish theatre. Dancers holding violins and bows quiver to klezmer music and execute taut lifts and dives to an original score by Anthony Coleman—look for exquisite partnering between Jeffery Crumrine and the petite, lithe Thea Little. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. May 18-21 at 7 and May 22 at 3.)

SAVION GLOVER

The tap star brings his show "Improvography II" to the Apollo for one night. Accompanied by his jazz band, the Otherz, and by his new troupe, Chapter IV. (253 W. 125th St. 212-531-5305. May 19 at 8.)

DANA TAI SOON BURGESS & CO.

"Tracings," a work from 2003 that commemorates the hundredth anniversary of Korean immigration to this country, comes to the Asia Society. Choreographed by Burgess, with a score by Jason Kao Hwang and Aaron Leitko and lighting by Jennifer Tipton. (Park Ave. at 70th St. 212-517-2742. May 21-22 at 8.)

"THE SHORT-CUT"

In an evening-length work inspired by Frederick Winslow Taylor, the twentieth-century scientific-management guru, the choreographer Hillary Easton deftly illustrates the costs and benefits of efficiency. A Taylor-like character (Steven Rattazi), armed with a stopwatch, drives the dancers toward maximal productivity and pontificates about the perfect beauty of repetitive acts. He is shaken, though, by the dancers' human inefficiency—their daydreaming, play, and warmth attract him, despite himself. Yet while their gears-in-a-machine patterns loosen and turn radiant, he cannot, or will not, change. With text by the novelist Helen Schulman and a score by Thomas Cabaniss. (Danspace Project at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 19-22 at 8:30.)

"SOLO/DUO"

Judging by this group show, Japan's contemporary dance scene thrives on fusion. A former gymnast turned Butoh performer, a comedienne with ballet training, and two followers of Limón are among the choreographers featured in an evening of solos and duets. Most of the performers share a preoccupation with isolated body parts. Natsuko Tezuka, in the piece "Anatomical Experiments II," treats the idea severely, as if she were dissecting herself. Shegemi Kitamura's "I.D." is more comic—her backside, decked in scarlet underpants, bobs to club music—while Yukiko Amano's imaginative "Kompeito" creates a sign language of the legs. Osamu Jareo and Misako Terada break the pattern, tracing a complicated relationship between a man, a woman, and two chairs. (333 E. 47th St. 212-752-3015. May 20-21 at 7:30.)

JOAN MILLER'S DANCE PLAYERS

"Miller's Mighty-Mouth . . . Militant, Melodic, Motor Driven and Surreal" is what the teacher and choreographer Joan Miller has named her thirty-fifth-anniversary season. Her work is like that—eclectic, full of verve, a little hard to read. The first six sections of "The Gender Hues," a première, seem unrelated, but Miller ties them together in a finale that has the feeling of a block party. Her recent work "Boots, Back Talk, and Beyond," inspired by South African culture and politics, enlivens its topicality with foot-stomping percussion, while "When Pigments Fly" expresses the rhythms she finds in the paintings of Herbert Gentry. (Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-568-8854. May 20-21 at 7:30.)

"SPRING STEPS"

The free dance series in the Winter Garden at the World Financial Center continues with a revival by Molissa Fenley and Dancers of "Hemispheres," an early, formal experiment that was last seen at its première at BAM, in 1983. In the evening-length piece, Fenley uses the six well-muscled dancers as pawns, which she arranges and rearranges on the stage, generating unexpected tensions and oppositions. With costumes by Rei Kawakubo and Ralph Rucci and live musicians performing Anthony Davis's Bessie-winning score. (220 Vesey St. 212-945-0505. Open rehearsal on May 17 at 12:30; performance at 8. Through May 24. No tickets necessary.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The company presents its final performances of the season. May 18 at 7:30: Andrei Serban's freewheeling, postmodern production of Gounod's **"Faust,"** with René Pape (a magnificent Méphistophélès), Roberto Alagna (in the title role), Soile Isokoski, Jossie Pérez, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; James Levine conducts. ♦ May 21 at 1:30: With Veronica Villarroel replacing Isokoski. ♦ May 19 at 8: An experienced cast—including Aprile Millo, Marcello Giordani, and James Morris—take their places for the Zeffirelli production of **"Tosca,"** one of the house's great breadwinners; Derrick Inouye. ♦ May 20 at 8: Like the other "little masters" of early-twentieth-century verismo—think of Leoncavallo, who wrote "Pagliacci," or Cilea, who wrote "Adriana Lecouvreur"—Franco Alfano has been remembered for only a single opera. Too bad it's another man's work: Puccini's "Turandot," which Alfano completed at the request of Toscanini (who later vilified him for it). But Plácido Domingo, in the twilight of his career, has shown a taste for this repertory, and the Met is mounting Alfano's colorful **"Cyrano de Bergerac"** just for him. Also with Sondra Radvanovsky, Raymond Very, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Marco Armiliato. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS:
"LOST CHILDHOOD"

Peter Kazaras serves as narrator in a concert reading of a new three-act opera, by the composer Janice Hamer and the librettist Mary Azrael, based on Yehuda Nir's memoir of survival during the Holocaust. The singers include Lori Phillips, Chris Pedro Trakas, and Michael Zegarski; Steven Osgood is the music director. (Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, Amsterdam Ave. at 76th St. 646-505-5708. May 18 at 7:30.)

AMATO OPERA

The Lower East Side's shoestring chamber-opera company, a crew of aspiring young professionals and robust amateurs, launches into its final production of the season, **"L'Elisir d'Amore,"** directed by Maestro Anthony Amato. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. May 21 at 7:30 and May 22 at 2:30. Through June 12.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

BACHANALIA FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

Nina Beilina, the distinguished Russian violin virtuoso, leads her group in an eclectic program of music by Bach (the Concerto for Violin and Oboe), Boyle, and Ravel (a selection from the "Mother Goose" Suite), along with three Joplin rags. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 18 at 8.)

NATIONAL CHORALE AND ORCHESTRA

Poulenc's flamboyant "Gloria" precedes a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The soprano Sharla Nafzinger and the bass Grant Youngblood are among the vocal soloists; Martin Josman conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-333-5333. May 20 at 8.)

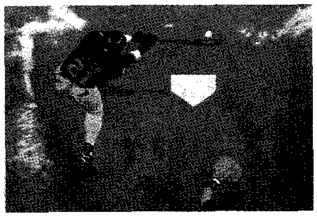
GRAND RAPIDS SYMPHONY

The Michigan orchestra makes its Carnegie Hall début performing Dvořák's "My Home" Overture, Copland's Third Symphony, and the sump-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE REALIST WORLD

The present boom in photography-based realist painting—which Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, among others, have been exploiting—gains an unusually qualified septuagenarian recruit: Malcolm Morley. Forty years ago in New York, the turbulent master, who had dedicated himself to painting when he was a young man in prison for theft in his native England, pretty much invented Photo-Realism, with scintillating views of cruise ships, beach scenes, and a Vermeer. He abjured photography in the early seventies, just as other painters were embracing it, and worked from his own drawings of rural and jungle landscapes, war toys, and island paradises. Morley's new renditions of athletes in action, stock cars colliding, and a collapsed tenement, which are now on view at Sperone Westwater, surprise and please, with bravura force that parallels rather than represents the violence of Sammy Sosa's swing or Dale Earnhardt's fatal crash. The sport pictures are not about sports, unless painting itself can be considered one. As a response to younger dabblers in photographic painting, this show suggests John Wayne remarking to Ricky Nelson, "I'll take it from here."

—Peter Schjeldahl



MALCOLM MORLEY, "BATTER'S BOX" (DETAIL), 2004 tuous Viennese Violin Concerto (with Dylana Jenson) by Karl Goldmark, an uncle of Copland's teacher Rubin Goldmark. David Lockington conducts. (212-247-7800. May 21 at 8.)

"A SONG OF ASCENT: THE SYNAGOGUE MUSIC OF SALAMONE ROSSI"
Cantica Salamonica, a group of early-music singers under the direction of the cantor Mark Opatow, gathers to sing pieces from the seventeenth-century Mantuan composer's collection of Hebrew sacred music. (East Midwood Jewish Center, 1625 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn. May 22 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

ENSEMBLE INTERCONTEMPORAIN
Jonathan Nott, fresh from his New York début conducting the very traditional Bamberg Symphony, returns with his Parisian chamber orchestra, one of Europe's supreme new-music bands. May 24 at 8: The group performs the American première of "ChaplinOperas" (extravagant accompaniments to three Chaplin shorts, "Easy Street," "The Immigrant," and "The Adventurer"), by Benedict Mason, a British composer who began his career as a filmmaker. ♦ May 25 at 8: Nott conducts two contemporary masterworks: Ligeti's mysterious and exhilarating Piano Concerto (with Michael Wendenburg) and Rihm's frenetic chamber concerto, "Hunts and Forms." (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

RECITALS

MIDTOWN CONCERTS: ROBERT MEALY
In a brief afternoon treat, Mealy, New York's world-class early-music violinist, offers Bach's grand Sonata for Solo Violin in C Major on the Church of St. Francis of Assisi's lunchtime recital program. (131 W. 31st St. May 18 at 1:15. No tickets required.)

"ON WINGS OF SONG" SERIES: ERIN WALL AND CRAIG RUTENBERG
The young Canadian-American soprano and her accompanist offer songs by Strauss, Copland (from "Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson"), and Debussy ("Proses Lyriques") in the season finale of the Marilyn Horne Foundation's annual concert series. (St. Bartholomew's Church Chapel, Park Ave. at 51st St. 212-378-0248. May 18 at 6:30.)

"NAUMBURG LOOKS BACK": ANTON NEL
A piquant program of Mozart, Corigliano, Granados, Debussy ("Estampes"), and Schubert (the "Wanderer Fantasy"), performed by the distinguished pianist and winner of the 1987 Naumburg Piano Award. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 18 at 8.)

THE KITCHEN: TONY CONRAD
The violinist, filmmaker, and radical early minimalist takes over the downtown performance space. May 18 at 8: Conrad restages "Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain," a "minimalist spectacle" and cry for peace involving a string ensemble and a projected black-and-white film loop. ♦ May 24 at 8: "Quadranga," a work for amplified string trio inspired by Latin-American dance, is preceded by a screening of three recent video works (including "Grading Tips for Teachers"). (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

BARGEMUSIC
May 19-20 at 7:30: The weekend at the floating chamber-music festival begins with a program of Russian piano music by Scriabin, Medtner, Prokofiev, and Rachmaninoff (six "Moments Musicaux"), performed by Olga Vinokur. ♦ May 21 at 7:30 and May 22 at 4: The members of the elegant and commanding American String Quartet offer a trio (the "Terzetto") by Dvořák, a quartet by Haydn (Op. 71, No. 2), and Brahms's Viola Quintet in G Major (with Jonathan Carney helping out). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

JĀMA JANDROKOVIĆ: "FIVE LOVERS"
New song cycles by Lori Laitman, Paul Moravec, and Luna Pearl Woolf, based on the young soprano's collection of autobiographical poetry and texts by Rilke, Yeats, Dana Gioia, and Gardner McFall. The performers, in addition to Jandroković, include the cellist Matt Haimovitz and the North Sky Ensemble. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. May 20 at 8.)

LOCRIAN CHAMBER PLAYERS
The Players, who like to promote works written in the last ten years, offer music by Osvaldo Golijov ("Lullaby and Doina"), Harrison Birtwistle, Tom Johnson, John Halle, and Harold Meltzer. (10th Floor Performance Space, Riverside Church, 91 Claremont Ave. May 20 at 8. No tickets required.)

PARTHENIA: "ARDO"
As in "ardor," an evening of passionate music for voices and instruments by Gabrieli, Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, and Byrd, performed by the noted viol collective and the soprano Jolle Greenleaf. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. May 20 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MUSIC AT THE MORRIS-JUMEL MANSION
The flutist Andrew Bolotowsky, the oboist Arnold Greenwich, and the recorder player Gregory Bynum offer music by Haydn, Hoffmeister, and Mattheson in the octagonal drawing room of Manhattan's oldest house. (65 Jumel Terrace, between 160th and 162nd Sts. 212-923-8008. May 21 at 3.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES: "CELEBRATING MILTON BABBITT"
The beloved elder statesman of total serialism enjoys a tribute concert encompassing his origins (music by Schoenberg), his influences ("The Owl and the Pussy-cat," by Igor Stravinsky, whose career was a testament to lifelong learning), and his own music as well (including "It Takes Twelve to Tango," for solo piano, and "Now Evening After Evening," a setting of verse by Derek Walcott). The performers include the singers Lucy Shelton and Thomas Meglioranza and the pianist Alan Feinberg. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. May 23 at 8.)

NEW YORK NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE
Several of academic modernism's big guns (including Andrew Imbrie, David Rakowski, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Wayne Peterson) receive performances of their music from the esteemed ensemble, which includes such virtuosos as the clarinettist Jean Kopperud and the percussionist Daniel Druckman. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 23 at 8.)

COMPOSERS CONCORDANCE
The refreshingly open-minded concert series, in its season finale, offers a mess of works by the formidable Brian Ferneyhough, the ebullient Alla Borzova, and the affable Libby Larsen ("Bid Call," for saxophone and cello), among others, along with two works by the late Meyer Kupferman. (Loewe Theatre, New York University, 35 W. 4th St. May 24 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MOVIES OPENING

DOMINION: A PREQUEL TO THE EXORCIST
Father Merrin discovers evidence of a pagan church in East Africa, in a horror film directed by Paul Schrader. Opening May 20. (In wide release.)

MOJADOS: THROUGH THE NIGHT
A documentary by Tommy Davis follows four Mexican men in their attempt to cross the border into the U.S. In English and Spanish. Opening May 18. (Pioneer Theatre.)

SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL: THE JOURNEY OF ROMÉO DALLAIRE
A documentary about the Tutsi massacre in Rwanda in 1994 and the general who headed the U.N. peacekeeping mission there. In English and French. Opening May 18. (Film Forum.)

STAR WARS: EPISODE III—REVENGE OF THE SITH
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 19. (In wide release.)

STOLEN CHILDHOODS
Len Morris and U. Roberto Romano directed this documentary about child labor, narrated by Meryl Streep. Opening May 20. (Quad Cinema.)

TELL THEM WHO YOU ARE
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 20. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

À TOUT DE SUITE
In 1975, Lili (Isild Le Besco), a quiet upper-bourgeois Parisian girl bored with her twin roles as daughter and art student, abruptly takes up with a handsome, gentle-looking boy (Ouassini Embarek) of Moroccan descent. The boy turns out to be a bank robber. Wanted by the police, he takes her off to Spain, Morocco, and then Greece, where he abandons her and she drifts around on her own. Based on the actual experience of Elisabeth Fanger (who wrote a memoir called "When I Was 19"), Benoît Jacquot's film holds our interest with the ar-

TABLES FOR TWO
LANDMARC

179 West Broadway, at Leonard St. (212-343-3883)—Usually, when a waiter says, "Have you been here before?" it suggests that you are about to be baffled by a strange and complicated system for ordering and assembling a meal. At Landmarc, however, the question accompanies the presentation of the wine list, and the ensuing spiel brings good news, the upshot of which is that you get great wine on the cheap. Some bottles cost less than they would at a liquor store, and half bottles cost as much as a glass at many restaurants. Apparently, the low prices are a result of high volume (and vice versa, setting in motion a nifty feedback loop). You may feel as though your drinking were being subsidized—as though you'd gone semi-pro.

Marc Murphy, a veteran of many kitchens and genres, and his wife, Pamela, opened Landmarc last spring, in a two-story space that used to be occupied by the Independent, and it has developed a reputation as a friendly neighborhood joint, well suited to a Tribeca now in its prosperous, baby-stroller phase. (Other eras are represented across the street: there's the Square Diner, a vestige of a more rugged past, and Buster's Garage, an open-air sports bar, a portent of a more boisterous future.) The food is a comforting but not entirely unadventurous amalgam of bistro, trattoria, and steak house—onion soup, rigatoni, rib eye, roasted marrow bones. Its unpretentious presentation is an acknowledgement that there is only so much one can or should do to fix up, say, a pork chop (a heap of spinach and caramelized onions and apples does the job just fine). Simplicity, of course, can also be dull, and there are moments (bland bucatini, monochrome shrimp risotto) when you wonder why anyone bothers with the Italian chow at all. The grill master compensates for such shortcomings with his arsenal of filets mignons, merguez sausages, and veal kidneys, which he tends out in the open, at a grill by the bar. Desserts are three bucks apiece. For less than the price of a bottle of wine, you can have all six. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $12-$31.)

—Nick Paumgarten

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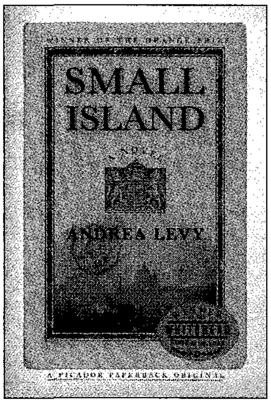
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ANDREA LEVY
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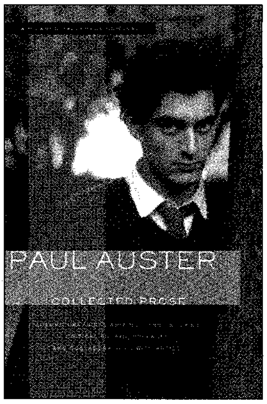
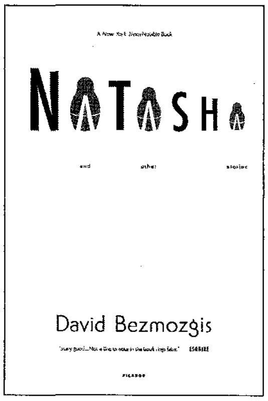
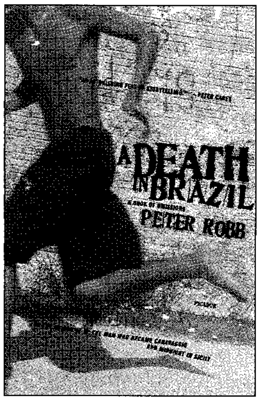

PAUL AUSTER
COLLECTED PROSE

From the celebrated author of *Oracle Night* comes a highly personal collection of essays, true stories, and collaborations with artists—essential reading from "one of the greatest writers of our time." (*San Francisco Chronicle*)


A New York Times Notable Book
NATASHA
and other stories
David Bezmozgis
PICADOR

"This hysterical, merciless, yet open-hearted excavation of a Jewish family in the process of assimilating gives his literary predecessors a run for their money."
—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*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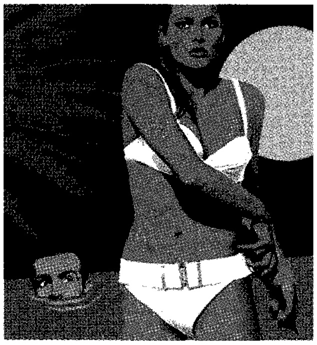
PICADOR PAPERBACKS...WHAT TO READ NEXT®

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE DOCTOR IS IN

James Bond is in bad shape. This is no slur upon the upper-body strength of Pierce Brosnan, who will—or will not, according to your sources—resume the role in the next installment. It is the franchise itself, the survival of *Homo nihilnihilseptem,* that has become prey to a creeping exhaustion. The only palliative for Bond fans is to dig out their tux or white bikini and stride into



JOHN RITTER

MOMA on May 20 or May 22 for a screening of "Dr. No." The movie, dating from 1962, was a shot in the dark, with Sean Connery emerging as the smartest gamble since Universal hired Boris Karloff. The fantastical existence of 007, untethered by Connery's solid bearing and very Scottish skepticism, would have drifted even sooner into arch frivolity. The producers had no inkling of the sequels that would stretch to the brink of doom, and the Bond formula—spying, sunshine, megalomania, and free trade in sexual advances—was still a fresh brew. After forty-three years of reheats, we are licensed to savor "Dr. No" as a period piece: a guide to that lost age in which a trip to Jamaica was not a boost to your air miles but the stuff of dreams.

—*Anthony Lane*

bitrariness of its heroine's behavior. We have no idea why she falls so heedlessly for this particular boy, who is virtually silent, or why anyone else does what he does. In the movie's proud refusal to explain or open up the characters, one can discern decades of French dedication to the *acte gratuit* as well as to elements of the terse anti-psychological dramaturgy favored by the New Wave directors. Jacquot shoots his tale in rather muddy, low-contrast black-and-white, and his young star's expressions alternate between radiant longing and a blankness so complete that one wonders at times if the heroine isn't merely stupid. This surly celebration of freedom isn't really satisfying or fun, but, then, it's not intended to be. In French.—*David Denby* (Angelika Film Center.)

THE BEST OF YOUTH

Six hours is a long time to spend in the company of somebody else's family, although, to be fair, it beats having to spend six hours in the company of one's own. Thanks to the director Marco Tullio Giordana, we are granted access to the Caratis, a fictional Roman clan, whose story, starting in 1966, covers more than thirty years and shows in two blocks of three hours. We follow the aging of the Carati parents and the progress of their four children—above all, of Nicola (Luigi Lo Cascio), smiling and slightly guarded, who grows up to be a psychologist, and of his handsome brother Matteo (Alessio Boni), whose rage for order finds him joining the police. When Nicola's partner, Giulia (Sonia Bergamasco)—her political principles as severe as her cheekbones—walks out on him and joins a terrorist cell, the stage is set for confrontation; to Giordana's credit, such clashes do not feel like a contrivance. The pace of the work, more leisurely than sluggish, allows the characters to clasp and hold our attention, to show as much bafflement as decisiveness, and to be brushed, rather than overwhelmed, by the major motions of history. In Italian, though, given the symphonic range of hand movements on display, the subtitles are largely redundant.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/25/05.) (Cinema Village.)

BLACK NARCISSUS

This lush 1947 adaptation of Rumer Godden's 1939 novel, about Anglican nuns wrestling with the sensuality that surrounds their Himalayan mission, keeps the screen aglow and the mind agog. Made by the British producing-directing-writing team the Archers (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), it's about faith and temptation; much of the Archers' career is summed up when a British estate manager (David Farrar) tells the Sister Superior (a suggestively tense Deborah Kerr), "There's something in the atmosphere that makes everything seem exaggerated." Without leaving England, Powell and Pressburger created a rapturous landscape whose colors seem to spill over onto the nuns' off-white habits. Filmed in Pinewood Studios and the Leonardslee Gardens, in Horsham, this is a landmark of Hollywood-on-Thames trompe-l'oeil. With Flora Robson, Kathleen Byron, Sabu, and Jean Simmons (as a native girl).—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; May 20-22.)

CRASH

A brazenly alive and heartbreaking film about the rage and foolishness of intolerance—the mutual abrasions of white, black, Latino, Middle Eastern, and Asian citizens in the great and strange city of Los Angeles. The movie starts off with separate vignettes in which the characters run afoul of each other, say things better left unsaid, and get into terrible trouble. Later, they cross paths again, sometimes in bizarre coincidences that feel exactly right; some of these scenes play out at the edge of insanity, where contentiousness spills over into tragedy or farce. The furiously candid screenplay was written by Paul Haggis and Robert Moresco, and the picture was directed by Haggis, who, in his first time out as director, demonstrates an amazing skill with actors. Don Cheadle, as a withdrawn, melancholy police detective, is the star, and the other players include Terrence Howard and Thandie Newton as an upper-class African-American couple, Brendan Fraser and Sandra Bullock as an L.A. district attorney and his bitchy wife, Chris (Ludacris) Bridges and Larenz Tate as carjackers, Matt Dillon and Ryan Phillippe as cops, and Shaun Toub as an Iranian shopkeeper who thinks everyone is out to cheat him. The gentle electronic score is by Mark Isham.—*D.D.* (5/2/05) (In wide release.)

FUNNY HA HA

This tender and repressed comedy, made on a shoestring budget by the young writer-director Andrew Bujalski, shows Marnie (Kate Dollenmayer), a bright but aimless woman on the verge of twenty-four, drifting passionlessly through pointless jobs in a college town with her unmoored fellow-graduates. It is an unlinked chain of missed connections—Mitchell (Bujalski) asks out Marnie, who is into Alex (Christian Rudder), who has a girlfriend. The cleverly diffuse dialogue, with a "like" or an "I mean" in every phrase, reveals a generation struggling to express anything at all besides uncertainty. Like Alfred Hitchcock's Marnie, a frigid kleptomaniac who turns out to have seen traumatic things as a child, Bujalski's chilled Marnie seems to have been mentally abused, and the script hints at the villain—television. By casting himself as her persistent admirer, Bujalski winkingly suggests the potential cure for her painful lack of passion: the redemptive power of art.—*Richard Brody* (Cinema Village.)

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

A bold, not to say foolhardy, attempt to divert the work of Douglas Adams, with its flood of ruminative wit, into a mainstream movie. Martin Freeman stars as Arthur Dent, your basic tetchy Brit, who is dragged along by his un-British—indeed, unhuman—friend Ford Prefect (Mos Def) on a trip through some of the more risible highlights of deep space. If you are not familiar with the conceit of the "Hitchhiker" franchise, whose previous incarnations include a radio series, four novels, and a TV show, you should find much to relish in the revelation that other worlds can be just as wearisome and mismanaged as this one. Many gags, ranging from Marvin the suicidal robot (voiced by Alan Rickman) to the Babel fish that you insert into one ear if you wish to understand all languages, survive, yet the film feels frantic and scattershot, and its rush toward a happy ending is wholly alien, as it were, to the wry pessimism of the original. Most of the cast, understandably, have a stranded and bewildered air, with the exception of Bill Nighy; he plays Slartibartfast, a donnish designer of planetary coastlines who once won an award for Norway.—*A.L.* (5/9/05) (In wide release.)

THE HOLY GIRL

Amalia (María Alche), a radiantly beautiful teenager growing up in a family-run hotel in a small Argentine city, is pulled between traditional religious teachings that insist on a saintlike career for women and sexual longings that are just as fierce as a teenage boy's. When a doctor attending a conference rubs up against her in a crowd, she reaches out to him, but he doesn't want an affair; he just wants to touch. Lucrecia Martel's gently comic movie is not about perversion; it's about the varieties of intimacy—between mothers and daughters, teen-age girls, doctors and patients. Martel shoots her movie with rapt attention to faces and bodies in the foreground while the life of the hotel spins loosely in the background. It's a distinctive visual style, but it's not a dramatic style, and the movie, for all its talent, isn't pulled together enough. Yet Martel is someone to watch: she has a fantastic eye for detail and mood. With Mercedes Morán as the heroine's divorced mother and Carlos Belloso as the doctor. In Spanish.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE INTERPRETER

The new Sydney Pollack movie is set at the United Nations: not the bear pit of recent wrangling but a barely ruffled pool of international good will. Among its many altruists is Silvia Broome (Nicole Kidman), an interpreter who was raised in Africa. One night, she hears what she believes to be the murmurings of a plot: a plan to kill Edmond Zuwanie (Earl Cameron), the murderous president of Matobo, a fictitious African republic. She has cause to hate him, but does that make her a suspect as well as a witness? On her case is Keller (Sean Penn), a Secret Service agent and purveyor of universal sadness. He starts to investigate Silvia and inches toward the verge of falling in love; if the movie were ten hours long, one could easily picture the two of them throwing caution to the wind and going out for a drink. The plot, meanwhile, follows an unusual course, rising to a tense and wiry scene involving a baddie, a bomb, and a bus but slumping to a thrill-free finale, whose credibility will explode if you say the words "swipe card" out loud. With Catherine Keener, thank heaven, as a fellow-agent, and the only person present to see the joke.—*A.L.* (4/25/05) (In wide release.)

JIMINY GLICK IN LALAWOOD

Martin Short's Jiminy Glick, a bulbous celebrity talk-show interviewer who made his début on Comedy Central a few years ago, is a great comic creation. Sycophantic yet rude, lascivious yet moralistic, Jiminy, who can't seem to get the credits of his guests straight, is the essence of hostile show-biz creepiness. On TV, Jiminy's guests (Tom Hanks, Billy Crystal, etc.) would crack up helplessly—they knew that in Short they had met their match. This loose-jointed movie, which sends Jiminy to the Toronto Film Festival, is funny only when he is conducting TV-style interviews. The rest of the movie is laboriously gross—it seems aimed at teen-agers rather than at the sophisticated audience that would understand Short's satire. Still, you may want to see Short do his thing with Steve Martin, Kurt Russell, and other celebs.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

At the butt end of the twelfth century, a blacksmith (Orlando Bloom) follows his noble father (Liam Neeson) to Jerusalem, in search of salvation, wealth, and adventure, though not necessarily in that order. He is shipwrecked en route, emerging from the wreck with the bleary air of a groom awaking from a successful stag party. This is one of many underpowered moments in the film, which, despite being directed by Ridley Scott, contrives to make a great and often magnificent fuss about the doings of a feeble hero; in this respect it is the very opposite of Scott's "Gladiator," which worked hard to earn its bombast. Much is made of the power play between the King of Jerusalem (a leper in a metal mask), his exotic and plainly loopy sister (Eva Green), his military adviser (Jeremy Irons), and a brace of leering villains (Marton Csokas and Brendan Gleeson). Opposing them is the mighty Saladin (Ghassan Massoud) and, more injurious still, the filmmakers' anxiety about causing offense to the faithful of any creed. The outcome is a movie so desperate to provoke comparisons with the religious enmities of today that it somehow forgets the fire in its own belly. With Edward Norton.—*A.L.* (5/9/05) (In wide release.)

KINGS AND QUEEN

Nora (Emmanuelle Devos), a Parisian bourgeoise and gallery manager in her late thirties, goes to Grenoble to visit her father, a famous writer and teacher who is looking after Nora's son for the summer. At the same time, Nora's ex-boyfriend Ismaël (Mathieu Amalric), a manic-depressive with bright eyes and the eager manner of a cocky teen-ager, argues merrily with two orderlies who arrive at his apartment to cart him off to the loony bin. A violist in a string quartet, Ismaël is a brilliant clown who finds his own rants so amusing that once he gets started he can't stop himself. The two narratives never really come together, which is a bit of a surprise. Over the years, we have seen so many French films that have made a fetish of precision that it's startling to see something that is freewheeling, explosive, and rather slovenly. Directed and co-written by Arnaud Desplechin, "Kings and Queen" is, by any normal standard, a mess, yet the movie is full of rhetorical excitement and brilliant moments. The music careers alarmingly from Henry Mancini to Anton Webern. In French, English, and German.—*D.D.* (5/16/05) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

KUNG FU HUSTLE

The director Stephen Chow (he also wrote, produced, and stars) assembled this fantastic martial-arts film as cleverly as Tex Avery approached animation. Characters run down the road at superspeed, take flowerpots to the head without a whimper, and fly through the air deliriously. The plot, about a group of over-the-hill, tenement-living kung-fu masters with superpowers who fight a group of axe-wielding gangsters, is anarchic; the cast of Hong Kong actors is comic perfection, especially Yuen Qiu (who plays a hair-curlered, cigarette-smoking landlady). The computer-enhanced stunt work is astonishing, but it's Chow's ability to find the humor in his flights of fancy that's truly distinctive. In Cantonese and Mandarin.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MONSTER-IN-LAW

In this comedy set in L.A., there are banks of flowers everywhere—great rolling tapestries of petals laid out in private homes, on the sets of TV talk shows, in restaurants. In case we missed the blooming-and-blossoming theme, the heroine, Charlie (Jennifer Lopez), a Venice Beach free spirit who works as a dog-walker, caterer, and temp, also paints floral whatnots on the walls of her apartment. Charlie, in an equivalent to Ben Stiller's role in "Meet the Parents," falls in love with a dreamboat (Michael Vartan) and has to do battle with his drunkenly possessive mother, played by the great Jane Fonda, who, in a misguided "comeback," gives a performance so strenuous that it's almost unwatchable. O.K., it's silly to get upset. "Monster-in-Law" is just a commercial product, as squarely aimed at teen-age girls as an advertisement for pink cell phones. Still, the self-confident fatuity and condescension of the entire show are offensive. The two lovers don't have an idea, an opinion, a trace of wit—all they want to do is cuddle and disappear into the petunias-and-roses California kitsch. Written by Anya Kochoff and directed by Robert Luketic.—D.D. (5/16/05) (In wide release.)

MYSTERIOUS SKIN

The director Gregg Araki's film, based on the sensational (in every sense of the word) novel by Scott Heim, retains the lo-fi road-movie atmosphere of his previous works ("The Living End," "The Doom Generation"), but there's a heartening maturity this time around. The story concerns an adolescent hustler (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), who's haunted by child abuse, and his former Little League teammate (Brady Corbet), who's attempting to find an answer to the amnesia he suffers when trying to recall a past incident. The actors capture the sad yearning of the characters, and Michelle Trachtenberg and Elisabeth Shue give strong supporting performances. Although this is Araki's best work, the film is finally too dreamy to dramatize the urgent storytelling of the novel. It drifts with an on-the-road aimlessness, losing its initial sexy, dark power.—*B.D.* (Film Forum.)

NIGHTS OF CABIRIA

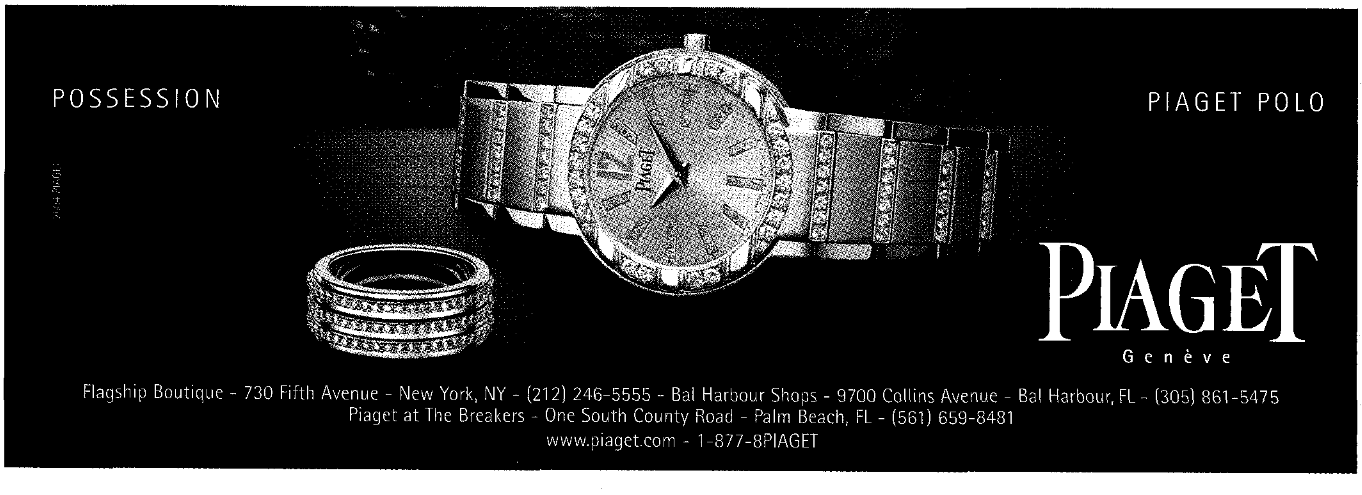
Possibly Federico Fellini's finest film, and a work in which Giulietta Masina earns the praise she received for "La Strada." The structure is a series of episodes in the life of Cabiria (Masina), a shabby, aging, dreamy little Roman streetwalker—a girl whose hard, knowing air is no protection against her fundamental gullibility, which, we finally see, is her humanity and her saving grace. A famous actor (Amedeo Nazzari) picks her up and takes her to his luxurious villa; she goes to a cheap vaudeville show, and when the magician hypnotizes her the innocent dreams of her adolescence pour out; a young man in the audience (François Périer) meets her and proposes to her, etc. Though the film seems free and almost unplanned, each apparent irrelevance falls into place. (It was the basis for the Broadway musical "Sweet Charity.") In Italian. Released in 1957.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; May 18-22 and May 24.)

SAHARA

Clive Cussler's franchise novel about the adventurers Dirk Pitt (Matthew McConaughey) and Al Giordino (Steve Zahn) gets the big-bucks treatment in the director Breck Eisner's Indiana Jones-style romp. The overstuffed plot, a Cussler trademark, concerns a missing Civil War ship, a beautiful W.H.O. doctor (Penélope Cruz), and, of course, buried treasure. McConaughey gives Pitt an irresistible masculine charm and energy that helps link the plot together, and Zahn brings a joyous, look-at-me spontaneity to the action. Their performances complement and support each other, and Eisner, who has a great eye for location and detail, keeps the whole whirligig plot turning with lots of pop and lots of corn. A treat.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

SYMBIOPSYCHOTAXIPLASM: TAKE 2½

In August, 1968, William Greaves filmed different pairs of actors in Central Park in the same scenario: a woman accuses a man of flirting with another man, and reproaches him for having insisted on her abortion. Greaves also showed himself meeting with the crew, rehearsing the actors, and directing the cameramen; meanwhile, crew members secretly filmed their own threats of mutiny against Greaves. His intention was to make five feature films from the material, and, while the first was completed in 1969, the remaining footage went unedited until, in 2003, Greaves, backed by Steven Soderbergh and Steve Buscemi, cut it together with new footage shot with the same actors and crew. The second time around, Buscemi included himself as a cameraman, a star turn that highlights the difference between the rebels of 1968 and the group of 2003, which included a crew member hanging out in a trailer who declared himself "answerable to the producer." The liberating



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audacity of the old material is the product of Greaves's hard-won artistic vision; the flatness of the new material, despite his unflagging spirit of adventure, reflects an era of diminished hopes and narrowed dreams.—*R.B.* (Moving Image; May 20.)

TELL THEM WHO YOU ARE

You can track the last half century of American film by looking at the cinematography credits of Haskell Wexler, from "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" to last year's "Silver City"; he has also directed several films, most notably the 1969 mix of fact and fiction "Medium Cool." It's safe to say, according to Wexler, that there's no film he's worked on that he couldn't have directed better than the guy in the chair—including this one. What makes this egomania particularly prickly is that "Tell Them Who You Are" is directed by his son, Mark Wexler, though "directed" may be an exaggeration: Haskell continually suggests camera angles, says when to cut, shapes the content, and is abusively sarcastic. Mark may have thought that this would be a good way for him and his father to resolve some long-standing personal issues, but he surely got more than he bargained for. Smartly intercut with examples of Haskell's work and interviews with such colleagues as Jane Fonda, Sidney Poitier, and John Sayles.—*Ken Marks* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Also Playing

KICKING & SCREAMING: In wide release. **MAD HOT BALLROOM:** Cinemas 1, 2, and 3 and Sunshine Cinema. **MA MÈRE:** Quad Cinema. **PALINDROMES:** Angelika Film Center. **UNLEASHED:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screening. May 18 at 7: "The Patsy" (1928, King Vidor; silent). ♦ "Eye & Ear Controlled Presents: Tony Conrad." May 19 at 7:30: Short films by Conrad (1966-77). ♦ May 20 at 8: "Coming Attractions" (1970, Tony and Beverly Conrad). ♦ May 21 at 5: Short videos by Conrad (1980-2002). ♦ May 22 at 6: A talk with Conrad, with film excerpts. ♦ May 22 at 8:30: Works produced for television by Conrad (1990-97). ♦ "The Onion Presents." May 19 at 8: "Shakes the Clown" (1992, Bob Goldthwait). ♦ Premières. May 20-24 at 7, May 21 at 4:30, and May 22 at 9:30: "6ixtynin9" (1999, Pen-Ek Ratanaruang; in Thai). ♦ May 20-21 and May 23-24 at 9:30 and May 22 at 4:30: "Last Life in the Universe" (2003, Ratanaruang; in Thai, Japanese, and English). ♦ "Essential Cinema." May 21 at 7:30: "Un Chant d'Amour" (1950, Jean Genet; silent), "Pull My Daisy" (1958, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie), and "Blonde Cobra" (1963, Ken Jacobs and Bob Fleischner). ♦ May 22 at 4: Short films by Dwinell Grant, Ken Jacobs, and Hollis Frampton (1941-71).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinema Tropical." May 18 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "La Ciénaga" (2001, Lucrecia Martel; in Spanish). ♦ Through May 22: Sergio Leone Westerns. May 19-20 at 4:30 and 7:30: "For a Few Dollars More" (1965). ♦ May 21 at 2 and 7: "Once Upon a Time in America" (1983). ♦ May 22 at 4 and 8: "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (1966). ♦ "Paul Robeson Speaks!" May 23 at 7:30: "The Emperor Jones" (1933, Dudley Murphy). ♦ The African Film Festival. May 24 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Jaguar" (1967, Jean Rouch; in French).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In repertory. May 18-22 and May 24 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Nights of Cabiria" (†). ♦ Special event: "Screen Deco." May 23 at 2:45 and 7: "Top of the Town" (1937, Ralph Murphy). ♦ May 23 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "Reaching for the Moon" (1930, Edmund Goulding).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Occupation of France Series." May 24 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Le Mariage de Chiffon" (1942, Claude Autant-Lara; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"First Nations/First Features: A Showcase of World Indigenous Film and Media." May 18 at 5:30: "The Minister of State" (1997, Paul-Anders Simma; in Swedish, Norwegian, Saami, Finnish, and German). ♦ May 18 at 8: "5th World" (2005, Blackhorse Lowe; in English and Navajo). ♦ May 19 at 6: "The Business of Fancydancing" (2002, Sherman Alexie). ♦ May 19 at 8:30: "Once Were Warriors" (1994, Lee Tamahori; in English and Maori). ♦ May 20 at 5:30: "Te Rua" (1991, Barry Barclay). ♦ May 20 at 8:30: "Mauri" (1988, Merata Mita). ♦ May 21 at 2: "A Bride of the Seventh Heaven" (2004, Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio; in Nenets). ♦ May 21 at 6: "Pathfinder" (1987, Nils Gaup; in Saami). ♦ May 21 at 8 and May 23 at 8:15: "Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner" (2001, Zacharias Kunuk; in Inuktitut). ♦ May 22 at 2: "Silent Tears" (1998, Shirley Cheechoo) and "Honey Moccasin" (1998, Shelley Niro). ♦ May 22 at 5: "Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance" (1993, Alanis Obomsawin). ♦ May 23 at 5:45: "Bedevil" (1993, Tracey Moffatt). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema." May 18 at 8:15: "The Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ May 19 at 6: "Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life" (1925, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack; silent). ♦ May 19 at 8: "The Toll Gate" (1920, Lambert Hillyer; silent). ♦ May 20 at 6 and May 21 at 2: "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" (1921, Rex Ingram; silent). ♦ May 20 at 8:30 and May 22 at 2: "Dr. No" (1962, Terence Young). ♦ May 21 at 4: "The Last Laugh" (1924, F. W. Murnau; silent). ♦ May 21 at 6: "Miller's Crossing" (1990, Joel Coen). ♦ May 21 at 8:30: "The Honeymoon Killers" (1970, Leonard Kastle). ♦ May 22 at 5: "Manslaughter" (1922, Cecil B. DeMille; silent). ♦ May 23 at 5:30: "The Tenth Symphony" (1918, Abel Gance; silent).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Black Light: Films from the African Diaspora." May 20 at 7:30: "Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take 2½" (†). ♦ "Film and Politics: A Day with John Sayles and Maggie Renzi." May 21 at 2: "Matewan" (1987, Sayles). ♦ May 21 at 6:30: "City of Hope" (1991, Sayles). ♦ A François Ozon retrospective. All films are in French. May 22 at 2: "Sitcom" (1998). ♦ May 22 at 4: "Criminal Lovers" (1999). ♦ Repertory nights. May 22 at 6:30: "The Crowd" (1928, King Vidor; silent).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. May 20-21: "Disco Doll in Hot Skin" (1977, Norm de Plume; in 3-D).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—May 24 at 6: "The 400 Blows" (1959, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ May 24 at 8:30: "The Chorus" (2004, Christophe Barratier; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through May 31: "Michael Powell: Beauty Unending." May 18 at 1: "The Small Back Room" (1949, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger). ♦ May 19 at 2:30 and 6:30: "Contraband" (1940, Powell). ♦ May 19 at 4:30 and 8:30: "The Spy in Black" (1939, Powell). ♦ May 20 at 2:30, May 21 at 9, and May 22 at 6:30: "Black Narcissus" (†). ♦ May 20 and May 22 at 4:30 and May 21 at 7: "The Edge of the World" (1937, Powell). ♦ May 20 at 6:30, May 22 at 2, and May 23 at 3: "The Battle of the River Plate" (1956, Powell and Pressburger). ♦ May 20 at 9, May 21 at 2:30, and May 24 at 3: "Ill Met by Moonlight" (1957, Powell and Pressburger; in English, Greek, and German). ♦ May 21 at 4:45 and May 22 at 8:30: "49th Parallel" (1941, Powell; in English and French). ♦ "*Film Comment* Selects." May 24 at 6:30 and 9: "We Jam Econo: The Story of the Minutemen" (2005, Tim Irwin).

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"
The weekly lunchtime reading series in Bryant Park gets under way for the summer with an appearance by Elmore Leonard, who will read from his latest novel, "The Hot Kid." (42nd St. between Fifth and Sixth Aves. For more information, call 212-803-5890. May 18 at 12:30.)

JIM LEFF
The intrepid eater, professional trombonist, and founder of chowhound.com talks about "The Chowhound's Guide to the New York Tristate Area." (Coliseum Books, 11 W. 42nd St. No tickets necessary. May 18 at 6:30.)

STEPHEN CLARKE
Clarke, a British-born magazine executive, spent the past ten years in Paris and turned his experience into the tongue-in-cheek, semiautobiographical novel "A Year in the Merde." After he self-published it in France, it became a surprise hit, and the American edition has just come out. Clarke reads from it on May 18 at 7. (192 Books, 192 Tenth Ave., at 21st St. No tickets necessary. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022.)

"NYRB CLASSICS"
In 1999, *The New York Review of Books* embarked upon a literary salvage expedition, reissuing out-of-print or simply overlooked books that deserve a better fate. The series celebrates the publication of its hundred-and-fiftieth title, J. G. Farrell's 1978 saga of a collapsing corner of the British Empire, "The Singapore Grip," with a reading on May 19 at 7. The writer John Banville will offer selections from that novel. Deborah Eisenberg will read from Dorothy Baker's 1962 tragicomic novella about a California family, "Cassandra at the Wedding," and Jonathan Lethem will read from Malcolm Braly's 1967 prison novel, "On the Yard." Edwin Frank, the editor of the series, will provide the introductions. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.)

"STANLEY'S CENTURY"
Lucie Brock-Brodio, Olga Broumas, Mark Doty, Nick Flynn, Edward Hirsch, Marie Howe, Major Jackson, Galway Kinnell, Karl Kirchwey, Cleopatra Mathis, Marie Ponsot, Gerald Stern, and other poets pay tribute to Stanley Kunitz, who will turn a hundred on July 29. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. May 19 at 7.)

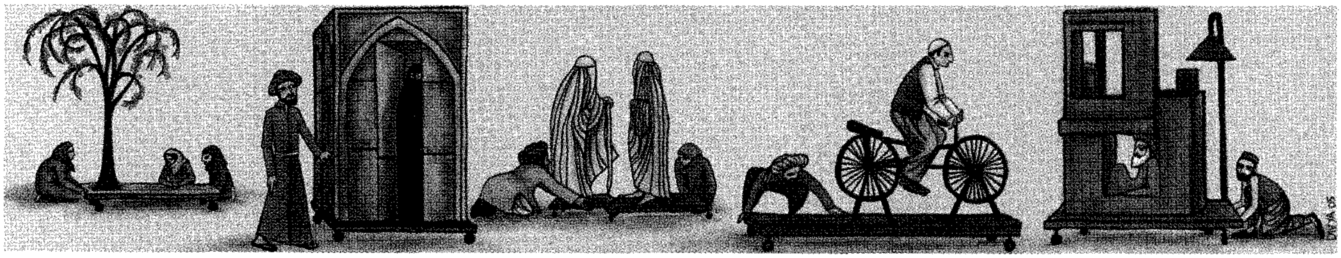
"VENUS AND ADONIS"
The actors Claire Bloom and John Neville read Shakespeare's erotic narrative poem. The violinist Gil Morgenstern will provide musical interludes. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 24 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"WORKING HARBOR DAY"
These days, the waterfront is often thought of as a location for new luxury housing, but New York Harbor is still one of the nation's largest ports. The tugboats, barges, and container terminals may be tucked out of sight, but on May 21 three separate narrated tours, running up the Hudson River, along the Brooklyn waterfront, and between Staten Island and New Jersey, will bring them into view. Boats leave every half hour from 11 to 4 from Pier 63 Maritime, where there'll also be food, entertainment, and the chance to roam aboard a working tugboat and the Frying Pan, a retired lightship. "We focus on things that you can't see from the Circle Line," the organizer, John Doswell, says. "Where the ships dock and where all the goods come from." (Hudson River at W. 23rd St. For more information, visit www.hiddenharbortours.com.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN'S CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL
This year's festival features dance, storytelling, and tepee-decorating workshops—the latter surely enhanced by the newly erected twenty-five-foot tepee inside the rotunda of the museum. (1 Bowling Green. 212-514-3700. May 21-22, from noon to 5.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
After the excitement of its Impressionist and modern sales, **Christie's** turns to the calmer waters of American paintings, drawings, and sculptures on May 19, including luminist masterworks, the elegant urban memoirs of the Ashcan School (such as Henri's "Jessica Penn in Black with White Plumes," expected to bring up to one and a half million dollars), and post-Armory Show provocations by Hartley and O'Keeffe. The day continues with a sale of American furniture, folk art, silver, and prints in the afternoon. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ◆ **Sotheby's** offering of American art on May 18 is at least as powerful as that of its rival's; it features major works by Benson, Heade, Cassatt, and Andrew Wyeth ("Battle Ensign"). But there is also a dose of glamour: the Judge Elbert H. Gary "Gold Service," a dazzling set of more than five hundred pieces of dinnerware, caps the sale of American folk art, furniture, and silver on May 19, while the two-part sale of furniture and decorative items from the collection of Gianni Versace (including a set of patinated metal sleigh beds by Julian Schnabel), held on May 21, takes the house gloriously over the top. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)



DIVYA SRINIVASAN

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HEARING MATTHESON
June 24-25

If the Boston Early Music Festival has it right, then Johann Mattheson, a contemporary of Handel and Bach who is mainly remembered as an important critic and theorist, is one of the most unjustly neglected of Baroque composers. The company's singers and players will make their case at Tanglewood, extending their world-première Boston run of Mattheson's lost opera "Boris Goudenow," from 1710. (Lenox, Mass. 617-266-1200.)

NIGHT LIFE
ZOOMA TOUR
July 7

The folks behind the Bonnaroo music-and-arts festival have launched a travelling version headlined by the former Phish guitarist Trey Anastasio and the roots-rocker Ben Harper. The New York stop, at Jones Beach, includes the hip-hop act Jurassic 5 and the blues-based rock duo the Black Keys. (212-307-7171.)

THE THEATRE
FRENCH THEATRE
July 17-31

Ariane Mnouchkine and her Paris-based Le Théâtre du Soleil troupe make their Lincoln Center début with the American première of "Le Dernier Caravansérail (The Last Caravan Stop)," a two-part, six-hour show, inspired by the travails of modern-day refugees, that doubles as the kickoff event for "Act French," a six-month citywide festival of new theatre works from France. (212-721-6500.)

MOVIES
TRAILER TREASURE
July 21

Commercials before movies are aggravating. Trailers before movies are not. And trailers without movies are, well, a kind of heaven. BAM will screen a program composed exclusively of movie trailers, including ones for camp classics ("Big Top Pee-Wee") and hilarious horror ("Twisted Nerve"), along with Orson Welles's featurette trailer for "F for Fake." Audiences will vote on their favorite trailer, and BAM will screen that film in December. (718-636-4100.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
IMPROV MARATHON
July 22-24

Del Close, a pioneer of improv comedy in Chicago, died in 1999, but he's honored each year at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre. (212-366-9176.)

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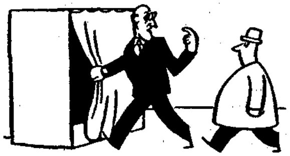
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BLAIR'S BUSHY TAIL

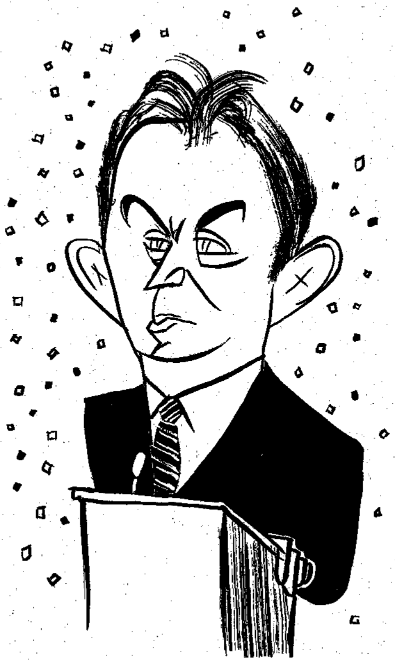


The results of the United Kingdom's general election a week ago last Thursday bring to mind a crowded neighborhood pub half an hour before closing time. The noise level is high, the patrons' moods range from giddy to morose, and the bar is covered with imperial-pint glasses that are half full. Or are they half empty?

The half-full (or more like three-quarters-full) view is that the election represents a signal victory for Tony Blair and his party. Blair was already the first Labour Prime Minister to succeed in serving out two full terms. Labour has now for the first time won its third election in a row—not in spite of Blair's leadership but because of it, specifically because of his farsighted strategy of dropping red-flag-and-cloth-cap "socialism" in favor of a streamlined, market-friendly version of modern European social democracy. In 1983—the year Blair won his seat in Parliament, and also the year Labour's musty platform (nationalization of industry, withdrawal from Europe, unilateral disarmament) was dubbed "the longest suicide note in history"—no one imagined that Labour would be where it is today. For sheer success at the ballot box, Blair's only rival in living memory has been Margaret Thatcher, another three-straight winner. But Blair's achievement is arguably greater. Starting from a considerably weaker historical base, "New Labour" has enjoyed an average majority of a hundred and thirty-seven in the six-hundred-plus-seat House of Commons; the Conservative Party's average majority under Thatcher was ninety-six. And Blair, after eight years as Prime Minister, is still one of the youngest people at the table, whether the meeting is of the G-8 heads of state or his own Cabinet. He turned fifty-two the day after the election.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The half-empty view is that the election, if not exactly a defeat for Blair, was about as close as he could get without losing his job. Labour's share of the vote barely topped the one-third mark—35.2 per cent, to the Tories' 32.3 and the Liberal Democrats' 22. (The remaining 10.5 went to regional and protest parties.) For the first time, the victors were outnumbered by stay-at-home voters (39 per cent)—unremarkable here, but a shocker there. Labour's showing was a winning party's worst since the Reform Act of 1832 nudged Britain toward something resembling democracy. Glenda Jackson, the Oscar-winning actress turned left-wing Labour Member of Parliament, summarized the case last week in a *Guardian* op-ed: "Some people are still trying to redefine the election result as a triumph. Get real."



The problem is, British elections are not so easy to get real about. Their electoral system, like ours, is geared for two-party contests, but the Brits, unlike us, stuff three parties into it. The crunch yields clear-cut winners in terms of seats, but at a severe cost in democratic representativeness. With the exception of the all-party Cabinets of the Second World War, no British government has taken office with majority support since 1935. Our losers usually do better than their winners. The last British politician to run stronger there than John Kerry ran here was Harold Macmillan, forty-six years ago, and neither Thatcher nor Blair ever managed to beat Michael Dukakis's 1988 vote share. Tea tastes better over there, but the leaves are harder to read. Let's give it a try anyway.

George W. Bush won his election,

and Tony Blair won his. Both campaigns were fought on issues of war and peace. But the underlying dynamics were mirror images of each other. Bush won in spite of his domestic record, especially his economic and fiscal record, which was both dismal and, according to the polls, relatively unpopular. A small but decisive section of the American electorate disliked his domestic policies but voted for him all the same, out of a belief that he would protect them against terrorists and other foreign enemies. Blair won because of his (and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown's) domestic record, the salient features of which were economic prosperity and modest improvements in public services.

But Iraq did Blair no good. In the *Weekly Standard*, a Washington neoconservative redoubt, William Kristol, noting that the Tories supported the war, concluded happily that more than two-thirds of the British electorate voted for parties with pro-war leaders. That is true, but it is not true that two-thirds of the British electorate is pro-war. The opposite is more nearly the case. When the MORI polling organization asked British voters which party had the best position on Iraq, the vociferously antiwar Liberal Democrats handily outpolled the two bigger parties. But in Britain, in contrast to the United States, the issue was not decisive.

When Brits and Americans look at Iraq, they see different wars. Eighty-eight British soldiers have died there, as against more than sixteen hundred Americans. Here, the "war on terror" occupies a huge psychic and political space, and what's going on in Iraq occupies a large part of that same space. Brits don't see it that way. Also, they think they know something about living with terrorism, and, on the whole, they think we're making too much of it. In this they are probably wrong. The scale, the ambitions, and the nihilism of Islamist terror are of a different (and far more dangerous) kind than the Irish-nationalist variety. But its targets, so far, are different, too: Britain has not been attacked. Asked by MORI to rank the importance of sixteen campaign issues, British respondents slotted Iraq at No. 14, just above animal welfare. Terrorism didn't even make the list.

In 2001, for the sake of the "special relationship," Blair attached himself to Bush, and then—for good reasons (abhorrence of Saddam Hussein's tyrannical cruelty, the hope of influencing the President's course) and bad (a fear of giving the Tories an opening)—to Bush's war. But no one on either side of the Atlantic doubts that things would be different if Blair, rather than Bush, were the *ex officio* Leader of the Free World. If Blair had had his way, it is reasonable to suppose, the United Nations inspectors would have been given more time; the alliances would not have been so strained; the Israeli-Palestinian mess would not have been neglected; the aftermath of the Iraq war, if the war had come at all, would not have been so thoroughly botched. Like Colin Powell, Blair all along tried quietly, and mostly unsuccessfully, to push Bush toward more sensible policies. Because he tried, he remains popular on the American center-left. Because he so often failed, he became an object of contempt, even hatred, among many from the corresponding part of the British political spectrum. If enough of them stuck with him to let Labour squeak through, enough abandoned him to issue a stern warning. "We had an accountability moment, and that's called the 2004 election," Bush said after his victory. "I have listened and I have learned," Blair said after his. No doubt the Prime Minister will keep trying to be the President's seeing-eye dog. But he is apt to be more alert to the perils of sitting in his lap.

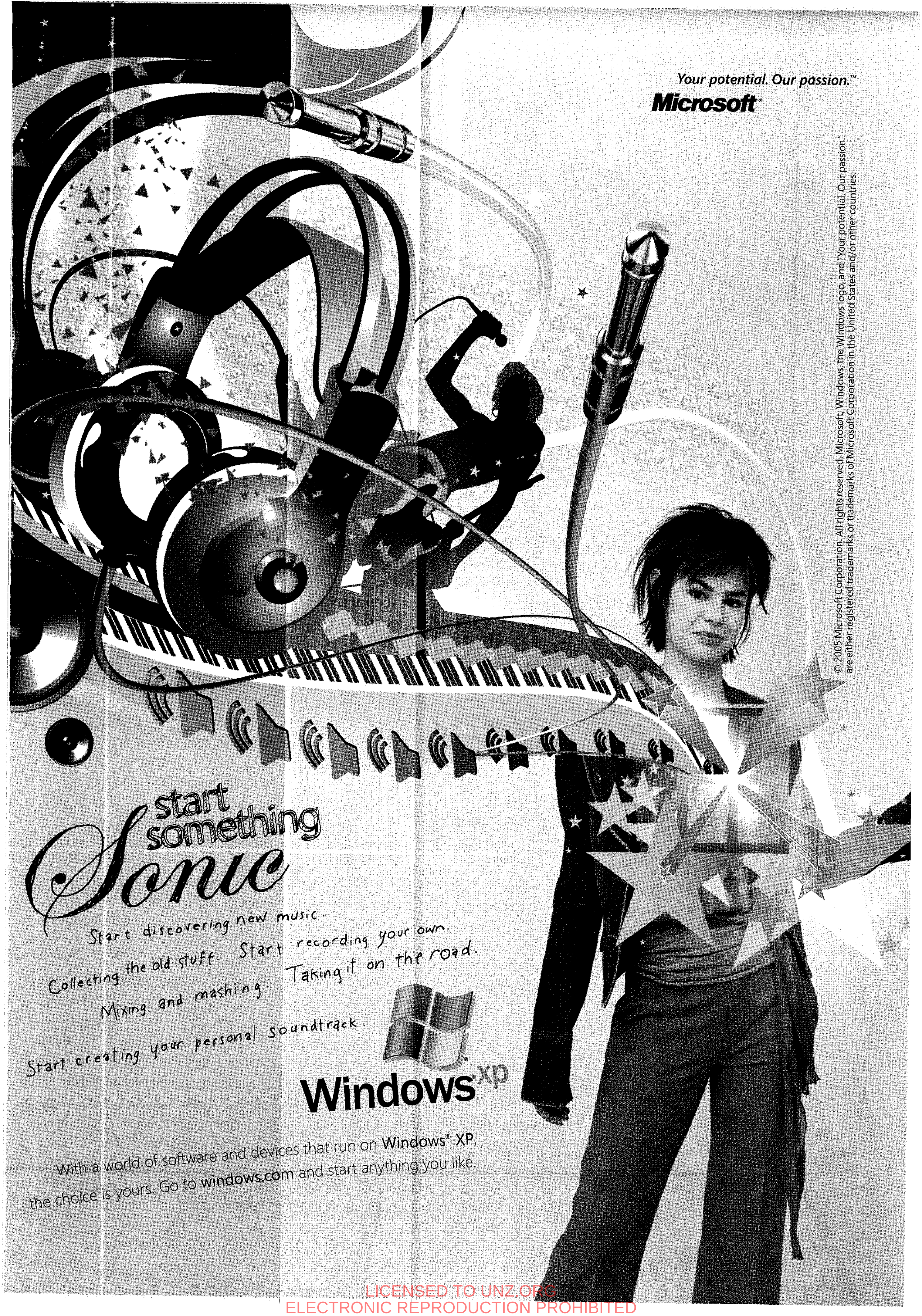
—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

DEPT. OF YESTERYEAR
U.N. ON ICE

Last week, a United Nations report revealed that the U.N. was considering a temporary move to Brooklyn, in 2007, to make way for a very expensive five-year renovation of its headquarters, in Turtle Bay. Brooklyn: the borough's boosters preened, while others wondered, as Reuters put it, about "the psychological impact to the organization and staff of moving from chic Manhattan to one of New York's less fashionable outer boroughs."

In terms of institutional relocation, there are various precedents—MOMA, the Oakland Raiders, Taipei, Babylon—but the most apt involves the U.N. itself. When a number of American cities competed to be the U.N.'s home, at the end of the Second World War, Robert Moses advanced New York's cause by proposing a giant complex—a World Capitol—in Flushing Meadow, on the site of the 1939 World's Fair. Queens: the delegates were ambivalent. Eventually, the Rockefeller family bought and donated the tract in Manhattan, and the Flushing scheme was forgotten. Still, while the Turtle Bay site was under construction, the U.N. needed a temporary home, and, after a brief stopover at Hunter College, it wound up in Flushing after all—in the New York City Building, one of a few structures left from the World's Fair. Shortly before the war, the building had been divided in half; one side became an ice rink, the other a roller rink. There were ice shows and big-band performances. In 1946, the skating surfaces were covered up, and the spaces were converted into the seat of world government. The U.N. stayed for five years (though the offices of the Secretariat were in a gyroscope factory in Lake Success). Its Flushing sessions were productive and star-studded: Eleanor Roosevelt, Andrey Gromyko, Adlai Stevenson. The creation of UNICEF, the birth of Israel, the debate on Korea. It happened in a rink in Queens.

One of this interlude's more fervent aficionados ("I'm *so* big on this") is David Oats, a fifty-five-year-old Flushing native who has edited both the Queens *Courier* and the Queens *Tribune* and is now leading an effort to have the Olympic stadium built near Shea. When, last week, Oats heard the news about Brooklyn, his feelings were mixed. "They're not going to Paris or Geneva or New Jersey," he said. "They're staying in New York, and that's a marvellous thing." Yet it also occurred to him that Queens had been passed over, and that a case might be made for a Flushing restoration. The roller-rink half of the old building is now occupied by the Queens Museum; the ice-rink half is still an ice rink, although it is doomed to be annexed by the museum, which is planning a renovation of its own. Oats spent three days thinking through the notion of the U.N.'s return to Queens. He made exploratory calls to a few U.N. and city officials. "I've been



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wrestling with this," he said. "I've reached the conclusion that it's not doable."

A visit to the rink suggested that Oats is a reasonable man. The skating season being over, the building was locked, but Scott Cunningham, a city engineer who was in the area making plans for a new rink on the other side of Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, agreed to open it up, for an exercise in historical visualization. It is a cavernous and dilapidated space—a shrine to a combination, peculiar to New York, of persistence and neglect. The mezzanine, former home to interpreters and diplomats, was crammed with abandoned office furniture and rolls of artificial turf. The skating surface, a giant square enclosed by hockey boards, had melted, revealing an expanse of sand and plastic tubing. Some of the equipment—a few of the temperature and humidity controls, for example—predated the partition of Palestine. Many of the signs seemed to as well: "Look in front of you, not at your feet, when in motion. Keep your knees bent. Learn how to fall. Try to relax. Rather than going stiff." It was difficult to picture elegant Adlai Stevenson here, to say nothing of Kofi Annan, or John Bolton.

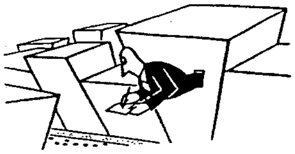
Another engineer, Mark Muir, fetched some tattered blueprints from the basement. They were dated 1946 and 1951, and were hard to reconcile with the existing space. The delegates' dining room, it appeared, had been near center ice. It was hard to tell what had preceded the penalty box.

The two engineers couldn't think of much that had happened at the rink in the intervening years. Then Muir remembered that right after the terrorist attacks on September 11th he had been instructed to hurry to get the ice made (he usually waited till October), so that the city could use the rink as a morgue. The need didn't arise.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

DEPT. OF INSPIRATION

WRITERS AT WORK



A room of one's own, in which to write: it's an old and chronically romanticized idea—the solitary space, with an ashtray, an Olivetti, the morning light just so. Each writer has his own preferences and fetishes, of course. For Proust, it was walls insulated with cork, to keep sound out. For Bellow, a tilted drafting table, so that he could write standing up. Cheever looked out a window facing the woods; Hawthorne turned his back on one. Joseph Heller worked atop a shag carpet. The ideal persists, in a wireless age. Amy Tan surrounds herself with furniture from Imperial China.

In Queens, recently, an artists' collective called Flux Factory commissioned architects to design three writers' "habitats"—human terrariums, essentially, into which writers would move for a month's time, as part of a "living installation" called "NOVEL." Three subjects relocated to the boxlike spaces about a week ago, and on June 4th they are expected to emerge with finished books. The Flux designers did not seek advice from other working writers about what makes a productive or inspirational space. Their guiding principle seems to have been: Just think what Solzhenitsyn could have written had his prison cell been properly feng-shui'd.

The week before the writers moved in, Flux's president, Morgan Meis, gave a tour of the unfinished boxes. "This one is pretty much a hobbit hole," he said of the first box, which was constructed mostly from found materials, bounty from a month's worth of "dumpster diving" by its designer, Ian Montgomery. Meis sat down and made a serious face, impersonating a writer. "So you sit here and concentrate, and you look out," he said, gesturing toward a dirt trough, where fast-growing grasses were to be planted, "to mark the passage of time." He added, "The roof will grow, too. The space will be growing through the month, as you write."

Nearby, an architect named Paul Davis was tinkering with the space his firm, Salazar Davis, designed for the writer Laurie Stone, a wood box with translucent walls and a ramp through the middle. He had read some of Stone's work for inspiration. "A theme of her writing seems to be herself and her thought processes—how she evaluates herself in relation to external circumstances," he explained. "She said that when she finds herself in scary circumstances, that incites her to make beautiful things. So we wanted to take a friendly little happy cube and unsettle her in a provoking way." For a retreat, he built her an alcove for yoga.

The third habitat, for Ranbir Sidhu, is the only one that prominently features books as décor. "We're working with units of storage to deal with writing as *product*," Mitch McEwen, one of the designers, said. "It's a literal writing factory." The product on display included John O'Hara's "Gibbsville, Pa."; a travel guide to Budapest; the Grolier Encyclopedia, Volume IX (Red-Str); "Kant's Life and Thought."

One of the most time-honored elements of writing-room mythology is the preference for a particular writing instru-

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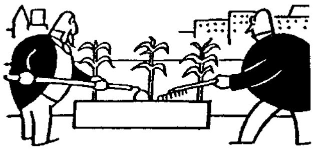
ment. As Jill Krementz demonstrated in "The Writer's Desk," William Styron requires No. 2 pencils and yellow legal pads, and John Ashbery likes a Depression-era Royal manual typewriter. Jonathan Franzen still uses MS-DOS software on an old I.B.M. clone he found in the classifieds for a hundred and fifty dollars. At Flux, each writer was issued a Mac laptop. The rules forbid the participants to watch television or leave their boxes for more than ninety minutes a day, but, perhaps unwisely, they encourage a more contemporary method of wasting time: blogging. By day three, yoga was evidently not enough to keep Laurie Stone from going stir-crazy. She wandered out of her box and began cataloguing the items in the Flux Factory kitchen for her blog: "A 15-roll sack of Bounty paper towels. A five-pound plastic jug of honey with sticky cap. A 32-ounce bottle of red hot sauce. A two-quart vat of Kikkoman soy sauce. A crate of oranges. . . ." A novel it was not.

A trip to Flux during visiting hours last week suggested that the writing process may be the same wherever you do it. Grant Bailie, who now occupies the hobbit hole, was sitting, Indian style, in front of the window, smoking. Ranbir Sidhu was sitting at his desk, sipping from a large coffee mug and staring at a mostly blank screen. Laurie Stone didn't respond to a couple of knocks on her wall. She appeared to be napping.

—*Ben McGrath*

STREET LIFE

TREE COUNT



As a "thoroughly, thoroughly urban person," growing up on West Sixty-sixth Street, Bram Gunther didn't care what type of trees were on his block. Gunther is the city's deputy director of forestry and horticulture, and he now knows that his old street is lined with honey locusts, and that there are more than thirty-three thousand of them in the city. "It's amazing, the human capacity to not notice things that you're not interested in," he said.

On a recent morning, Gunther crossed Fifth Avenue and headed east on Sixty-fourth Street, embarking on a dry run to test the forms and equipment that are to be used in a new citywide census of street trees, due to begin next month. Over the summer, more than a thousand volunteer "tree stewards" will comb the five boroughs, noting the presence, size, and condition of every silver linden, pin oak, redbud, and Japanese pagoda, among other species (there are about seventy in all). The Parks Department will use this information to identify "urban forest trends," to estimate the monetary value of the city's trees, and to inspire a new generation of tree geeks. The first census, conducted in 1995, counted nearly half a million street trees in the city, out of an estimated total of five million trees, when parks and yards are included.

Ginkgo

"In Queens, it's going to be the Norway maple and the London plane, the same as in the other boroughs," Gunther said. "But Manhattan is unusual in that the Callery pear and the ginkgo feature much higher. The Callery pear is Manhattan's favorite tree, but its internal structure is very weak—it dies quickly, and its limbs fall a lot."

This, however, was a ginkgo block—there were five between Fifth and Madison, on the north side of the street. Almost all of them had wounds from car doors, locked bicycles, or bugs. The fourth one in had a birdhouse tied to a limb—an "infrastructure conflict," in tree-census talk. The fifth, in front of the Indian consulate, had been cut down—a stump. On closer inspection, the pit of soil surrounding the stump was found to be emitting steam. Gunther stared at it for a while, then approached a chauffeur whose Town Car was idling nearby. "Did someone spill hot water there?" Gunther asked.

"No, sir," the chauffeur said. "That's how it is, sir. All the time it's steaming, sir."

"No tree could survive that," Gunther said.

Down the block, Gunther came to a soaring London plane in front of a town house that belongs to the Versaces. "It's a little underweight," he said. "It looks like a skinny boy." The London planes, he went on, "are the direct legacy of Robert Moses. This and the Norway maple were his two favorite trees." Neither is planted anymore, because both host the Asian long-horned beetle, the biggest threat to trees on the East Coast. "If the beetles aren't stopped, it could be devastating," Gunther said. "A moonscape!"

Midblock, in front of the Wildenstein family's mansion, was another London plane and a littleleaf linden, in pits planted with holly and variegated euonymus. "Clearly, somebody's taking care of them." The trunks of the trees were surrounded by metal guards, which protect them from various encroachments. "Dog piss," Gunther said, shaking his head. "It just kills them."

He passed town houses belonging to the Bronfmans and Ivana Trump, and stopped at a honey locust that had sprouted three-inch-long, pencil-thick black thorns, at eye level. "Very dangerous," he said, snapping a few of them off. "I'm going to call this in and have the forestry crews come by to make a real assessment." On the trunk of the block's easternmost Callery pear, someone had carved "MP ♥ RN."

On to Sixty-third Street: flowering cherry (pink), Japanese zelkova (stately), more honey locusts (spiky). Gunther pulled up in front of a Kentucky coffee tree. "If you see these in a month, with their flowers, dropping their little coffee beans—they're just wonderful, wonderful trees," he said.

Sixtieth Street between Fifth and Madison was completely barren, a sooty gray waste. Gunther called out the reasons for this as he made his way east: "Subway! Grate! Bus stop! Garage! Canopy! Grates! Vaults! Driveway! Awning! Light pole!

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Again with the canopy!” Nearing Madison, he slowed and said, “You could plant a tree over there in front of Barneys, if nothing’s underneath the sidewalk. You could do one there and four here.” He made a note on a clipboard. “We’ll do a Code 53, which will tell us what’s underground, with all the utilities and the vaults.” (In older parts of the city, the infrastructure may be just a foot beneath the sidewalk; a tree needs at least eighteen inches.) “And if there’s no problem I’m just going to go in and put in those trees. Just put them in, don’t even ask.”

The next block appeared bare as well, until Gunther pointed out a row of small trees closer to Park Avenue. Pagoda trees? Golden rains? Black locusts? Weird ginkgoes? No, Gunther said. They were redwoods—dawn redwoods, an Asian relative of the California variety. Who knew? Apparently, a few years ago, the owners of the co-op on the corner asked the Parks Department for “something special,” then paid for these trees and steel tree guards, which turned out to be a little too “fortresslike” for Gunther’s taste. “Imagine, if you will, a feathery, light-leafed dawn redwood, fifty feet tall, shading the building, dropping its whispery leaves,” he said quietly. “I just think it’s a wonderful thing. I like it.”

—Andy Young

ICONS
MR. G.

If you had been sitting in front of the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the other morning, you might have noticed that the handsome, square-jawed man kneeling next to you (aviator-framed glasses, black turtleneck, black leather jacket, black mustache, black hairdo, a touch of gray at the temples) was unmistakably Robert Goulet. Any lingering doubt would have been dispelled when, a few minutes later, he made a sweeping gesture with his left hand and, in a rich baritone, said, “Oh, God—the work, the work, the work. I’ll tell you—I wouldn’t want to be the fellow that has to dust this place.” Goulet is not a practicing Catholic (he left the Church in 1962, when it refused to give him a dispensation to marry his second wife, the actress Carol Lawrence), but he prays a lot, and he describes Jesus and Mary as “my dear friends.”

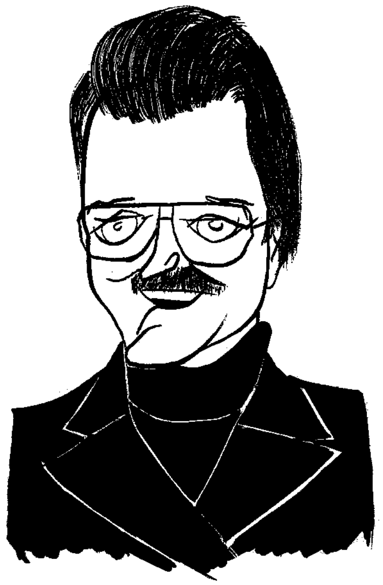
Goulet established himself as an icon of stolid virility with his plummy rendition of “If Ever I Would Leave You,” in the 1960 Broadway production of “Camelot.” Now he is onstage in New York for the first time in more than a decade. As Daniel Davis’s replacement in the revival of “La Cage aux Folles,” he plays the more masculine half of a long-term gay couple. “I guess I’d be considered the alpha male,” Goulet said, over an after-church lunch at the Park Avenue Café. “Is that what they call it when you’ve got two gays together, the alpha male? Anyway, the one that doesn’t wear a dress.”

As he ate oysters and sipped white wine, Goulet discussed a wide range of topics, among them the secret to staying trim and youthful at seventy-one (“Isometrics”) and the vicissitudes of his three marriages. (He refers to all his wives as “she,” as in “She was in town to visit Sammy and Altovise, and she called me up and asked if she could come by for dinner on my boat.”)

Goulet lives in a seven-thousand-square-foot house in Las Vegas, and he spoke lovingly of the art collection that he and his current wife, Vera, who is also his manager, have assembled to cover its walls. Goulet bought his first piece in the late fifties, in Toronto, where he was the host of his own television variety show. “It was a wonderful painting of a rather willowy and elongated lady,” he recalled. “She reminded me of a dancer in our show, who I was trying to bang. I really wanted to jump her bones.”

Today, the Goulets’ collection includes original Hirschfeld drawings of Goulet in touring productions of “South Pacific” and “Man of La Mancha” (“The old son of a bitch always made me look like Jay Leno, but she thinks they’ll be worth a fortune after I’m dead”), a landscape by Tony Bennett (“It was a gift from Steve and Eydie”), and a painting of a clown by Red Skelton. The Goulets like sculpture, too. They own several pieces by Peggy Mach (“Great broad, great broad”), whose bronze lovers are also collected by William Casey, and a four-foot-tall model of an Indian brave playing a flute for an Indian maiden—both of them apparently growing out of the earth—which they first saw in the art gallery of Caesar’s Tahoe. (After they got it home, Goulet decided to change its name from “The Flute Player” to “Roots.”)

Goulet isn’t sure what he’ll do after his run in “La Cage aux Folles” ends, in January. He would like to get his own room in Las Vegas again, and he hopes someday to win an Academy Award. But, at the moment, he feels grateful for his long career and his good fortune, and he would like to give something back, by teaching. “I’m going to put out a voice-development course, on CD—ten bucks extra for video,” he said. “ ‘Do you want to have a stronger, richer, more powerful voice?’ Something like that. I’ll do the commercials, at least in North America. We can sell it in Mexico and Central and South America, with a guy like Banderas. But I’m not sure if China would even be interested in it. I just don’t know—I mean, with the way they speak.” Goulet scrunched up his eyes and spoke rapid gibberish in a high-pitched nasal singsong, then added, “Japan would probably be the same thing.”



Robert Goulet

Goulet said that his course would be aimed at “everyone from nineteen to ninety-three,” though he hoped that it would be of particular benefit to the elderly. (“They spend too much time slumped in front of the TV.”) If there is one lesson that Goulet hopes to convey, he said, it is “No screaming, yelling, or shouting—we must be kind to our cords.”

—Adam Green

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

HIGHER RISK

Crystal meth, the Internet, and dangerous choices about AIDS.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

San Francisco's Magnet center is hard to miss. It occupies a storefront directly across the street from Badlands, a city landmark of its kind, at Eighteenth and Castro Streets, perhaps the gayest address in the world. Magnet is a drop-in clinic for a community that has been besieged by health problems for nearly a quarter of a century—since the men of the Castro began to die of the plague.

Even today, with a million Americans infected with H.I.V. and half a million others already dead, many of the clinics and counselling facilities that focus on the health of gay men remain dreary places, largely hidden from view. Magnet is neither of those things. Its bright setting, modern furniture, and polished wood floors make it look far more like an art gallery than like a doctor's office. One needn't be sick to go there, nor is it necessary to make an appointment. Drop in any time, to be tested for syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, or H.I.V. It also functions as what its director, Steven Gibson, calls a "hotel lobby for the people of the Castro, a place to talk, to worry, to smile, to cry," or, as Magnet's Web site puts it, to "cruise (online or real time)."

Last month, on one of the first genuinely warm nights of spring, the center held a small gathering called Tina's Café. The sidewalks of the Castro were filled with men. So were the bars and coffee shops; the Men's Room, the Midnight Sun, and even the "gay" Starbucks, on Eighteenth Street, were all bustling by 8 P.M., and a small crowd had begun drifting into Magnet. A new exhibition had been installed—a series of sexually suggestive pictures taken from the Internet. The visitors stared at the walls in awkward silence for a while, then took seats at tables covered with lollipops and M&M's. There was a bar with wine and soda in the back, where a d.j. was setting up his equipment. Soon, a tall man in a short dress appeared. His name was Michael Siever, and he wore a brunet wig, high-heeled pumps, and magenta stockings. "Welcome to Tina's Café," Siever told the crowd. "I am really glad you are here. We are going to talk about what's real tonight. About paranoia and violence and anger and fear. About reality." A couple of dozen heads nodded in unison. "We are going to talk about what is happening to our world." Siever has the soothing voice of a psychotherapist, which he is. He is also the director of the Stonewall Project, a highly regarded counselling program. "Tonight, above all, we are here to talk about Tina."

Tina is crystal methamphetamine, a chemical stimulant that affects the central nervous system. It is hardly a new drug, and it has many other names: biker's coffee, crank, speed. It has also been called redneck cocaine, because it is available on the street, in bars, and on the Internet for less than the price of a good bottle of wine. Methamphetamine is a mood elevator, and is known to induce bursts of euphoria, increase alertness, and reduce fatigue. In slightly less concentrated forms, the drug has been used by truckers trying to drive through the night, by laborers struggling to finish an extra shift, and by many people seeking simply to lose weight. Crystal first gained popularity in the gay community of San Francisco in the nineteen-nineties, where it became the preferred fuel for all-night parties and a necessity for sexual marathons. Its reputation quickly spread. Crystal methamphetamine is highly addictive, but its allure is not hard to understand; the drug removes inhibitions, bolsters confidence, supercharges the libido, and heightens the intensity of sex. "The difference between sex with crystal and sex without it is like the difference between Technicolor and black-and-white," one man told me at Tina's Café. "Once you have sex with crystal, it's hard *to imagine having it any other way.*" The first thing people on methamphetamine

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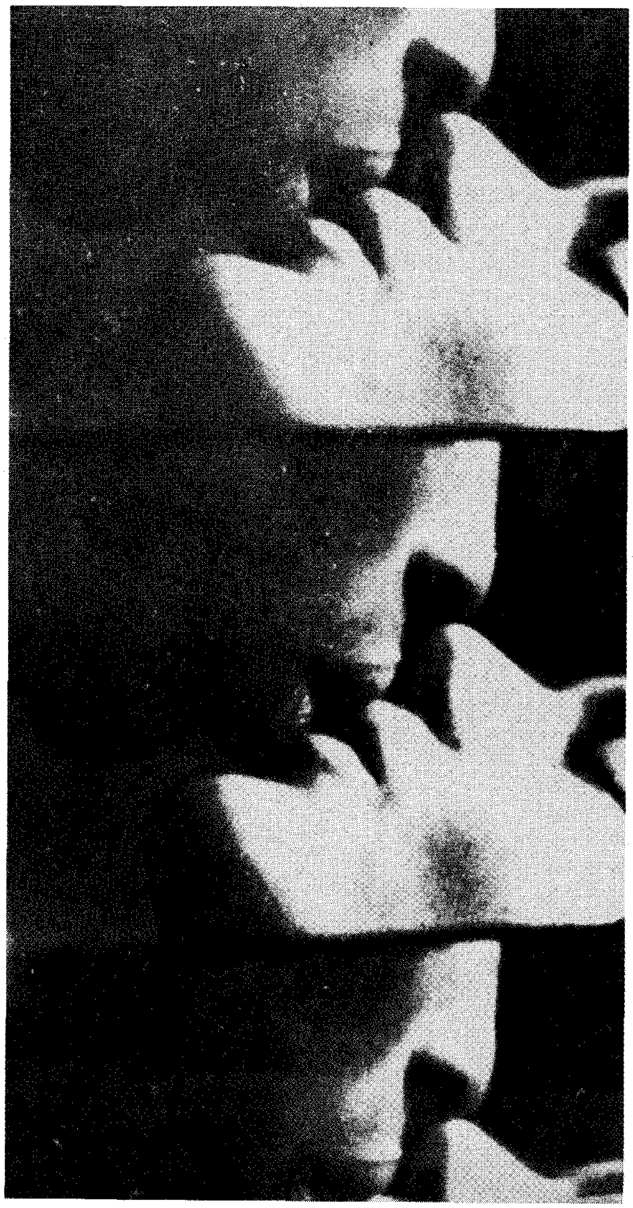
lose is their common sense; suddenly, anything goes, including unprotected anal sex with many different partners in a single night—which is among the most efficient ways to spread H.I.V. and other sexually transmitted diseases. In recent surveys, more than ten per cent of gay men in San Francisco and Los Angeles report having used the drug in the past six months; in New York, the figure is even higher.



H.I.V. rates in the gay community are on the rise.

ANDY WARHOL, "KISS" (1966)/ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS/ARS, NY

After years of living in constant fear of AIDS, many gay men have chosen to resume sexual practices that are almost guaranteed to make them sick. In New York City, the rate of syphilis has increased by more than four hundred per cent in the past five years. Gay men account for virtually the entire rise. Between 1998 and 2000, fifteen per cent of the syphilis cases in Chicago could be attributed to gay men. Since 2001, that number has grown to sixty per cent. Look at the statistics closely and you will almost certainly find the drug. In one recent study, twenty-five per cent of those men who reported methamphetamine use in the previous month were infected with H.I.V. The drug appears to double the risk of infection (because it erases inhibitions but also, it seems, because of physiological changes that make the virus easier to transmit), and the risk climbs the more one uses it. Over the past several years, nearly every indicator of risky sexual activity has risen in the gay community. Perhaps for the first time since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the number of men who say they use condoms regularly is below fifty per cent; after many years of decline, the number of new H.I.V. diagnoses among gay men increased every year between 2000 and 2003, while remaining stable in the rest of the population.

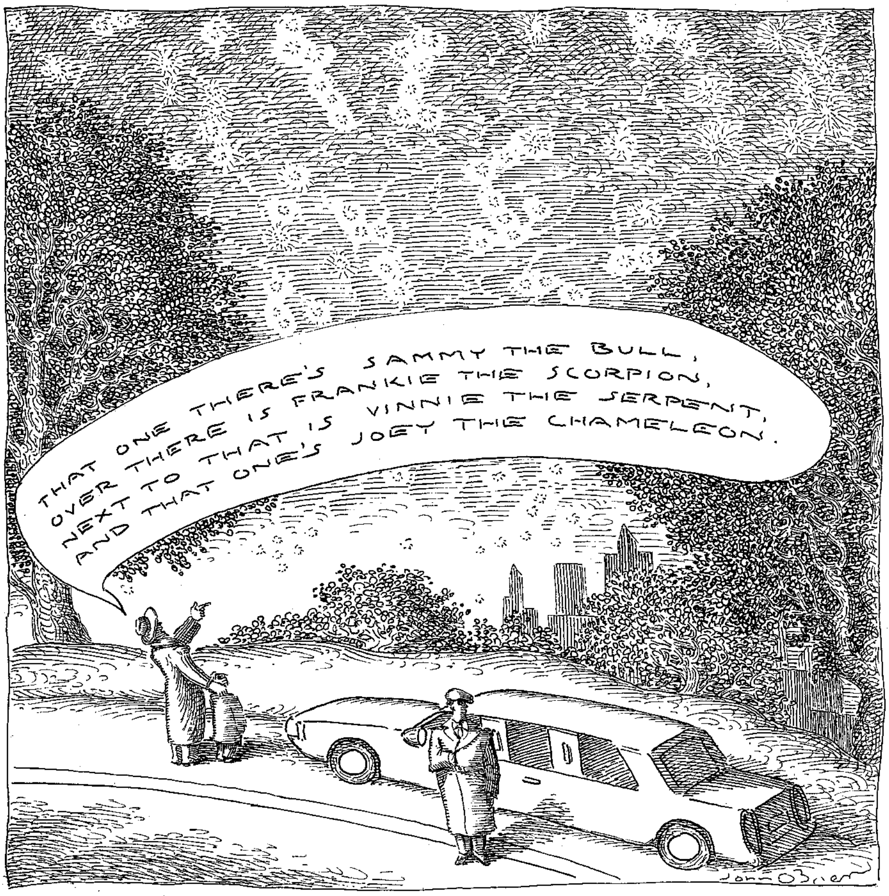
In San Francisco, I spoke with several men about the thrills and the dangers of crystal methamphetamine. Their stories, often eerily similar, tend not to end happily. "I used to have the house and the Mercedes and the big job," a lawyer named Larry told me at Tina's Café. "Then I fell into crystal. Oh, my God, it was great. I felt young and powerful and wonderful. And the sex. I was having the type of sex I could have only fantasized about before." He sat for a moment and sipped from a can of Diet Coke. "Crystal destroyed my life," he said. "I sold everything I could put my hands on. What I didn't sell, I lost: my house, my career. The more I used it, the more I needed it. At one point, I broke into my own house to try and steal furniture. Crystal tells your brain to go back and get more, more, more. The logical side of your mind is saying, 'I can't keep doing this,' but you are still on your way to the dealer's house." Larry has been off methamphetamine for three years, but he says the struggle begins anew every day. "Crystal motivates everything. The sex. The desire. Everything." He shook his head. "I wish I had never heard of it, but I can't say it wasn't great."

Twenty million people have died of AIDS, most of them in Africa, where the epidemic grows more devastating every year, as it does in places like China, Russia, and India. Ten thousand people die each day—seven every minute—and seventeen thousand more become infected. In America, however, the sense of crisis has passed. After increasing rapidly throughout the nineteen-eighties, the number of new cases peaked in 1993, and within two years so did the number of deaths. In 1996, when effective H.I.V. therapy became widely adopted, the incidence of AIDS began to fall dramatically. Few diseases without a cure have evolved as rapidly. In 1985, AIDS was considered so horrifying that Ryan White, a sweet-tempered boy from Indiana, wasn't even permitted to attend his seventh-grade class for fear that he could infect his schoolmates. Gay men were routinely turned away by terrified staffs at hospitals, and film crews even refused to work on stories that involved AIDS patients. These days, however, H.I.V. is often compared to diabetes—a chronic but largely manageable disease.

Yet AIDS has not disappeared in America; there are more than forty thousand new H.I.V. infections each year. (The numbers have remained remarkably high especially among black gay men, minority women, and drug addicts who share needles. What's new is the rise in infections in the gay communities in such cities as San Francisco and New York.) Nonetheless, AIDS has receded as a threat in the public consciousness, and as a cause for philanthropy or for political discourse. That is almost as true in the gay community as it is anywhere else. After all, many people have seen friends or lovers rise from what seemed like certain deathbeds once they received the proper medications. Those medicines transformed gay life, and, naturally, the new physical realities were accompanied by a tremendous change in attitudes about what H.I.V. meant. By the late nineties, there were thousands of men living with H.I.V. who were vigorous, healthy, and eager to reclaim the type of life they thought they had lost. As they began to gain weight and feel better, many returned to the kinetic night life that had virtually disappeared at the height of the epidemic, including all-night "circuit parties," which often include serial sexual encounters.

With bars in places like Chelsea and the Castro filling with healthy men, and the continual migration of new people in search of a more open life, some men began to wonder, What's so bad about H.I.V.? It's a treatable disease. Pharmaceutical companies ran ads depicting H.I.V.-positive men as rugged and virile. At first, such advertisements seemed necessary, to insure that people realized that the new treatments could help them return to a normal life. But some ads went far beyond that. Impossibly active men were shown climbing mountains or racing sailboats, and though the ads may have been unrealistic, they played into the growing medicalization of America. Pharmaceuticals have become a basic part of the lives of millions of people in the United States, who routinely take pills for depression, cholesterol, and blood pressure, to help pay attention in class, to sleep, and to cure sexual dysfunction. The fact that tens of thousands of people were undertaking a battery of anti-H.I.V. medications didn't seem unusual.

"It's hard to maintain your vigilance for twenty-five years," Michael Siever told me one day at the Stonewall offices. "What was my life once? You used to walk down the street and see death everywhere you looked. People with lesions on their faces, people on crutches and in wheelchairs, if they could even go outside. I went to memorial services every weekend. Always. This was a community of ghosts. And that is not true anymore. There is this cocktail, and it was like magic. Before that, AIDS was always in your face; you could never put it out of your mind, but after enough years you just want to forget. And now you can go somewhere and in the heat of sex—and I am not even talking about the drug part, just in the heat of sex—it's much easier to forget. I used to have a button that said, 'If It Moves, Fondle It.' People miss those days and wish they were part of them, and the drug helps you get back to the place where all your concerns go out the window."


THAT ONE THERE'S SAMMY THE BULL,
OVER THERE IS FRANKIE THE SCORPION,
NEXT TO THAT IS VINNIE THE SERPENT,
AND THAT ONE'S JOEY THE CHAMELEON.

Crystal methamphetamine became popular among people in the gay community just at the moment when the drug cocktails for H.I.V. were starting to work, and when the Internet had begun to shape the way people interacted socially. "I was seeing a patient at one of the S.T.D. clinics one day," Jeffrey Klausner, who is the director of the Sexually Transmitted Diseases Prevention and Control Services of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, told me. "It was in the spring of '99, and we were starting to see a small increase in the number of syphilis cases in gay men: ten in 1998, and by the next spring there were already another ten. I asked this one guy how many sexual partners he had had in the past two months, which is something we always ask. And he said fourteen. And then I asked him how many he had had in the past year. And he said fourteen.

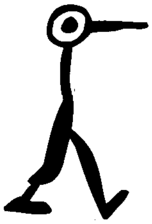
"That was a little odd," Klausner continued. "I said, 'Well, what happened two months ago?' The man replied, 'I got online.' "

Klausner is a tweedy sort of doctor; he dresses in khakis, blue blazer, and button-down shirt, and unabashedly conveys the image of a man who is by no means cool. "I didn't have a clue what he meant," he said. "Nothing. So he explained it. 'Well, I am a fifty-year-old, overweight, H.I.V.-positive man. I am balding; I'm not that attractive. But I can go online any time of the day and I can get a sexual hookup. I can go to this site on AOL and I can say I want to meet somebody now for sex. And that's all there is to it.' "

Recounting this story six years later, Klausner still looked mystified. "I asked him to explain. And he told me, 'I go online and put out my stats—if I am a top or a bottom, what I like to do. I am a top, I am H.I.V.-positive. So I will say, "Does anyone want to be topped by an H.I.V.-positive guy?" ' "

Klausner continued to recall the conversation: " 'I'll get five responses in half an hour. And then I will speak to them on the phone. If I like their voice, I will invite them over and look through my window. If I like what I see, then I will be home, and if not I can pretend I am gone. It's been great. I don't have to talk to anybody to do it. I don't have to go out of the house. I can get it like this,' he said, and snapped his fingers."

After hearing the story, Klausner asked his public-health investigators to include questions about that kind of activity in their routine interviews. Seven out of the next nine people they saw had met their most recent sexual partner online. "It turned out that crystal methamphetamine and the Internet were the perfect complements for high-risk sex," Klausner said. "Crystal washes away your inhibitions. Makes you feel good and want sex. And the Internet is there to respond to your whims. It's fast, it's easy, and it's always available."



Klausner and others embarked on studies that concentrated on the use of the Internet, on attitudes about AIDS, and on the role of methamphetamine in gay life. The results were hard to misinterpret: the Internet has turned out to be a higher-risk environment than any bar or bathhouse—men who meet online are more likely to use the drug, more likely to be infected with H.I.V., and less likely to use condoms.

Methamphetamine can be consumed in any number of ways: you can drink it, snort it, inject it, swallow it in a pill, take what is known as a "booty bump"—insert the drug like a suppository—or "hot-rail" it (a process in which you heat a glass bowl, put the powder in the glass, and inhale the vapors, which go straight to your lungs). "Methamphetamine has a nine-to-twelve-hour half-life, which means that weekend warriors can start on Thursday and only dose five times to make it to Sunday evening," Steven Shoptaw, a psychologist with the U.C.L.A. Integrated Substance Abuse Programs, told me.

Shoptaw and his colleague Cathy Reback, a principal investigator at Friends Research Institute, who also works for the Van Ness Recovery House, in Los Angeles, have carried out some of the most comprehensive research on the effect of the drug on gay men. "You are going to be active," Shoptaw says. "Feeling sexy. The libido will be pushed and, with the advent of Viagra and other, similar drugs, you no longer have to worry about 'crystal dick' "—which had seemed like the one obvious drawback to the sexual experience that methamphetamine provides. Crystal methamphetamine constricts the blood vessels, which makes sustained erections difficult. Viagra reverses that effect. "So now you can go from Thursday to Sunday and have outrageous amounts of sex," Shoptaw said.

"It's cheap—you can get a hit for twenty bucks that lasts a day. It is the perfect drug." Shoptaw added, "The issue about how a drug interacts with a culture also matters, because, if having that kind of sex is important, then this drug fits with the culture in a way that cocaine and alcohol don't."

The physical changes caused by methamphetamine are profound. The drug instantly increases the amount of at least three neurotransmitters in the brain: dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine. Those chemicals are released naturally by the body when we feel good, but crystal unlocks a constant flood of the substances, particularly dopamine. In contrast to cocaine, which is almost completely metabolized in the body, methamphetamine lasts much longer. As with all drugs, the bigger the rush the harder the crash. After long use, the effects diminish in intensity, and depression is common. Abusers forget to drink water, and can become dangerously dehydrated. The chemicals used to make the drug are so toxic that for those who smoke it there is the danger that their teeth can crumble and fall out. Severe anorexia and malnutrition are also risks. Methamphetamine can cause heart failure and stroke. All users, not just addicts, suffer some long-term damage to the brain; memory loss and paranoia are common.

"In other places with other people, H.I.V. is a different issue," Shoptaw told me. "But with gay men it is about the drugs. It's simply about methamphetamine. The data on that are so clear."

In Shoptaw's office at U.C.L.A., he and Reback showed me a slide that said almost everything one needed to know about the relationship between H.I.V. and methamphetamine use: it summarized a survey of how likely certain gay men were to be infected with H.I.V. If the men in the study said that they had used methamphetamine in the past six months, there was a low but significant

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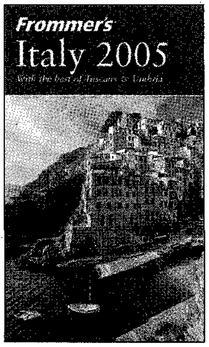

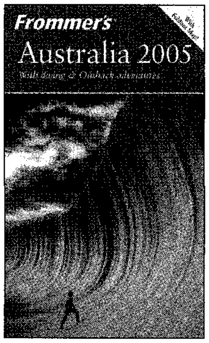

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chance that they would be infected. For men who used it once in a while, the figure was twenty-five per cent. When the researchers interviewed chronic users, the number climbed to forty per cent. Sixty per cent of users in outpatient treatment programs were infected, and for users in residential care the number is nearly ninety per cent.

"You know that slogan from the Clinton campaign?" Reback said. "We have paraphrased it many times: 'It's the drug, stupid.' When you are talking about H.I.V. infection among gay men, it's the drug."

I walked over to the Starbucks on Eighteenth Street with my laptop one afternoon and went online. There are dozens of sites devoted specifically to uniting men for the purposes of immediate, anonymous, and, often, drug-induced sex. The Web site Craig's List has unintentionally become a sexual superstore for men and women, straight or gay; there is m4m4sex.com and also manhunt.org, the current favorite in San Francisco. (There is hunkhunter.com and bigmuscle.com, among many, many others.) The sites were numbingly similar, and the advertisements on them couldn't be more explicit. Statistics are usually invoked, and pictures of body parts provided (or sought) as proof. It almost makes the seventies, when throngs of men congregated in bathhouses and on the piers of the Village, seem innocent. Despite laws and regulations instituted at the height of the AIDS epidemic, sex clubs continue to exist in many cities; there is, for instance, the West Side Club, housed in an unexceptional-looking building in Chelsea, where men—both H.I.V.-negative and H.I.V.-positive—can have anonymous and, if they want, unprotected sex. Another club in New York admits only men with certain physical attributes; others demand that all clothing be checked at the entrance (except, apparently, boots). In San Francisco, clubs are legal, but most sexual encounters are not supposed to be permitted. They are, of course; why else go to a sex club? At least there you can put a box of condoms on the counter and some posters on the walls. Education and interventions are not easily transferred to cyberspace. "The Internet sucks you in," Tom Orr told me in San Francisco. Orr, a thirty-four-year-old native of Seattle, rewrites show tunes in a salacious, funny way (much like "Forbidden Broadway"), from a gay perspective. "On the Internet, you can be whoever you want to be. Smoke some crystal, get online, and there is nothing you won't or cannot do." He is trying to quit the drug. For the most part, he has been successful, he said, but there have been occasional lapses. At Tina's Café, for example, where he performed some of his songs, he mentioned a serious "Christmas binge." He said, "It's a constant temptation. It's everywhere in this town. Anyplace you swing your purse."

I went to the personals section of Craig's List and clicked on the link for "men seeking men." Then I typed the letters "PNP" into the search bar at the top of the page. ("PNP" stands for "party and play." It's the not very secret code that means you want sex and drugs.) "We call it ordering in," Orr had told me earlier. In less than a second, there were seven hundred and seventy-one entries on my list. (This was just for that day in the San Francisco Bay Area. For comparison's sake, I carried out the same search on the New York City version of the Web site and saw two hundred and twenty-one postings.) The first San Francisco listing said, "Preppy white bottom guy, coming to Castro wants to get fucked." There followed an extremely detailed list of the man's various attributes ("38, 5'8", 150, medium complexion, well built, 8 x 6 cut") and his desires (needs PNP). Another post said, "U.L.L.4 O. P.P.," which stands for "Up Late Looking for Other Partying People." Another said, "I'm a hot, down-to-earth, VERSATILE black male and I'm looking for an erotic adventure. Not interested in predictable 'orifice by numbers' encounter, and tired of scripted narratives/verbal roles." He went on to say that he was "PNP friendly" and "POZ" (H.I.V.-positive), and that he was hoping for something hot and unexpected. Immediately.

"I don't want to romanticize something that was often very hard and even dangerous," Jeff Whitty told me when I met him the following week in New York. Whitty wrote the Tony Award-winning musical "Avenue Q," and he has talked a lot about the dangers of crystal methamphetamine. "But I long for the days when people would actually cruise each other. I can't remember what I was reading—I think it was Gore

"Right now all my money is in poker."

• •

Vidal's memoir, and he paints these pictures of being gay after the war, when you would follow someone for fifty blocks. It was a weird, funny ritual, but in a way it was actually more open. At least you could look at somebody, see how the person moved, interact. But that is now gone. Now we have the Internet when you want to hook up. You can get sex within minutes. Anonymous. No names. No commitments. No connections. Is that what we are really looking for?"

One of methamphetamine's most dangerous effects is the weakening of inhibitions gay men might have about unprotected anal intercourse; people are suddenly happy to be receptive partners—"bottoms." The argument is often made that heterosexuals engage in risky sex, too, and that, in any case, most gay men don't. But it takes only a small group to fuel an infectious epidemic.

"I don't think I can say what kind of life most gay men want," Whitty said. "But if they are doing this on the Internet, with methamphetamine, and they are infected with H.I.V., then they are going to infect other people. I don't care what kind of sex anyone has. That's up to them. But we have a problem. And we need to start dealing with it a little more responsibly if we don't all want to die. How many times does that message need to be sent?"

On February 11th, the New York City Department of Health announced that a gay man who had repeatedly engaged in unprotected sex with many partners while using crystal methamphetamine was diagnosed with a remarkably aggressive strain of H.I.V.—a "supervirus"—that was resistant to essentially all normal medications. The diagnosis was made late last year, and within four months the man had progressed to AIDS—a process that can take a decade or more. The announcement, which caused a furor in the gay communities of New York and other cities, was a frightening reminder of the precarious lives of the millions who are infected with H.I.V. But it was little more than that. There is so far no evidence to suggest that this single case represents a greater threat; the announcement seemed to have much more to do with publicity, awareness, and fear at a time when public-health officials say that complacency in the gay community has become common. The man, whose name has been withheld, is in his mid-forties. He had been using crystal methamphetamine about once a month for five years but recently had started using it at least every week. Excessive use of crystal methamphetamine not only lowers your inhibitions but compromises the immune system, which is essential for any defense against H.I.V. Viral resistance is hardly new, nor is it a phenomenon restricted to H.I.V. Also, people who use H.I.V. medications need to take them at regular intervals. A weekend drug binge, when reality is banished, and even water is rarely consumed, seems unlikely to encourage such a regimen.

Still, it was the man's age that surprised me. I could understand that people who had not been alive to see men dying by the thousand in San Francisco, New York, and other cities might have to learn to exercise caution. But the average age of newly infected gay men in New York and San Francisco is nearly forty. The real problem lay not with naïve youngsters but with those who had been aware of this epidemic virtually their entire adult lives. "You want to kill yourself?" Larry Kramer writes in his new book, "The Tragedy of Today's Gays." "Go kill yourself. I'm sorry. It takes hard work to behave like an adult. It takes discipline. . . . Grow up. Behave responsibly. Fight for your rights. Take care of yourself and each other." Kramer has been offering such advice for decades. How, in 2005, can people ignore it? What could motivate a person who has lived through the worst of the epidemic to cast off the safe-sex practices that have protected him for years?

"For a lot of people, this is like coming out of a really tough war," Daniel Carlson told me. Carlson is a thirty-five-year-old former marketing executive who two years ago started H.I.V. Forum, in New York, because he was concerned that gay men simply weren't confronting the central problems facing their community. "They want to deal with it all by running away," he said. "There is tremendous pain and there has been for years. The prevention message has been lost completely. It

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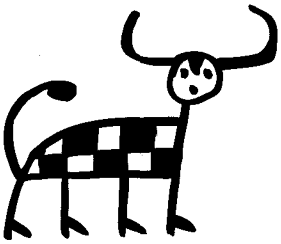
used to be simple: AIDS equals death. Now the world is murkier than that. Fatigue is genuine. But also gay culture is focussed on youth, and once you hit forty you are no longer that cute kid on the block, the pretty kid. You are not married. You don't have a partner, and you are trying to assess what you want out of life. There are many who are confused and unhappy, and you mate that with cultural norms that have moved away from safety and you have a pretty explosive situation."

There is also evidence to suggest that the resurgence of H.I.V. is a result of problems that go beyond the midlife crises of gay men who did not expect to be alive today. It is never easy to fashion a message that can change the behavior of a community—let alone a dispirited and often despised minority. "We knew from the first days of the epidemic that knowledge was necessary but not sufficient," Ron Stall, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh, told me. Stall recently left the Centers for Disease Control, where he ran the Prevention Research Branch at the National Center for H.I.V., S.T.D., and T.B. Prevention. "If you want to demonize the gay man about his sexual behavior, then you might as well walk up to somebody who is smoking a cigarette and ask him if he knows it is dangerous, or ask somebody who is driving without a seatbelt. This is a basic phenomenon we see among humans—taking a risk because it is convenient in the short term, even if in the long term it is something none of us would do. After all, it's not just one cigarette that causes emphysema; it's making a poor choice for thirty years.

"The epidemic of crystal methamphetamine is real and it's serious," Stall continued. "But I suggest that everyone just stand back and ask, How is it that AIDS and substance abuse have been twin epidemics that have interacted and made each other worse? That question has bothered me from the beginning." For his research, Stall has drawn on data collected from the Urban Men's Health Study, one of the largest surveys taken of a gay population. He looked at mental-health issues such as depression, partner violence, and substance abuse. He also examined the extent to which the men in this study of nearly three thousand people reported having been sexually abused as children. "I was surprised to see the extent to which one epidemic was associated with the other," he said. "Depression, partner violence, substance abuse." He controlled the sample for race, class, level of education, and H.I.V. status. Then he and his colleagues cross-referenced the data from all of the categories and found that each category was associated with all the others. That means that there are at least four significant epidemics going on in gay communities in the United States, and that they are interacting and making one another worse. Stall refers to this phenomenon as "syndemics"—a syndrome of interacting epidemics. The higher the number of the epidemics that any particular man experienced, the more likely he was to have risky sex, and to test positive for H.I.V.

"This suggests that substance abuse is a thread in a larger tapestry," Stall told me. "And one shouldn't forget that crystal methamphetamine also acts—at first—as an antidepressant. People talk about 'Will and Grace' and how accepting America is now of homosexuality. That is simply not true. America has come a country mile, I agree. Still, in the state I just left"—Georgia, where the C.D.C. has its headquarters—"almost four out of every five adults recently voted to deny gay men and lesbians the right to even have a civil marriage. We have an awful lot more work to do."

So, of course, does the gay community, which many people feel has badly distorted the fundamental message of prevention, by subordinating it to the idea that there is nothing wrong with being H.I.V.-positive. I went to see a Bay Area psychologist named Walt Odets one morning in his sunny, well-tended house, on a quiet street not far from the Berkeley campus. For many years, his clients have been mainly gay men. He is fifty-eight but looks far younger. Odets is an uninfected gay man who readily admits that for him the pain of the epidemic has not dissipated. "I still hold an intuitive horror about the whole thing," he told me. "Sometimes I think of myself



as a trauma victim. I had a partner who died in ’92, and it is still a horror to me. But I can see that it depends on circumstances. Many people don’t really care.”

Odets believes that the gay community split in 1985, the moment a reliable H.I.V. test was available. “Before that day, everyone was in it together,” he said. “Nobody knew who had it and everyone acknowledged that it was a horror. And then, in April of 1985, we started protecting people who had H.I.V. And we did that by normalizing infection—and we have done that all along. It has completely compromised prevention work, to the extent that when the AIDS Health Project, in San Francisco, put up a banner outside its facility that said ‘Stay Healthy Stay Negative’ the gay public was incensed. Men wrote in and said, ‘I have H.I.V. and I am perfectly healthy. How dare you imply that I am not?’ ” While it has always been important to protect and support H.I.V.-infected men in the gay community, Odets argues that it has become difficult to teach men who test negative how essential it is for them to remain uninfected. “This is not about making positive men feel good about themselves,” Odets said. “It’s about protecting H.I.V.-negative men.” He told me that he had even conducted workshops where it was nearly impossible to shift the primary prevention message from supporting positive men to remaining uninfected. “There is just way too much guilt. Too much discomfort because what you are saying to a positive man is ‘I don’t want to be like you.’ ”

Daniel Carlson agrees. “There is some level of guilt about not living with the disease,” he said. “About staying negative. People will say, ‘Oh, look at you going around and glorifying your negative status.’ I don’t go around and say, ‘Hey, I tested negative today, joy to the world.’ And, believe me, when people test positive they do talk about it and they get support. People like me—we keep our mouths shut.”

A few weeks ago, I spent an evening stuffing condoms and lubricant pouches into packets at the headquarters of Gay Men’s Health Crisis, in New York. The organization, founded by Kramer and several friends in his Village apartment in 1982, has evolved considerably since then. It was formerly run by, and for, white men, but its president now is Ana Oliveira, who has spent much of her working life in the South Bronx. You are just as likely to see a Hispanic man or a black woman in the elevator as a white man from Chelsea or the Village. The condom-wrapping group meets periodically to prepare packets (two condoms, two pouches of lubricant) to hand out at discos or gay clubs or in communities like Fire Island—any place gay men might gather to have sex. The annual Black Party was held at Roseland in March, and a team from G.M.H.C. was there with a supply of condoms. The Black Party is one of many on the gay circuit where thousands of men meet to dance, to drink, and, sometimes, to engage in anonymous sex. The parties often last past dawn. A friend of mine who was there this year said that it was almost impossible to find a condom, or information about H.I.V., but that crystal methamphetamine was for sale everywhere and sexual activities ranged from “unbelievable to outrageous.”

At G.M.H.C., six men sat at a ten-foot-long table in a conference room, sipping sodas and putting condoms into packages. They talked about the epidemic as they worked. Each had spent time in the past two years trying to persuade people to practice safe sex. It’s not an easy task, but there are some signs of progress. “A year ago in the Barracuda”—a Chelsea club—“we couldn’t even hand out condoms,” Norman Candelario, a staff member at G.M.H.C., said. “It’s better now. Not great. But better. Now we are asking why are people using crystal. And the answers are always body image, stigma, age. It’s really self-esteem. A lot of these men are just lonely and depressed.”

Murmurs of agreement circled the room. “So we go right at that,” Timothy Kokott, one of the volunteers, said. “We talk to people about the problems, and I tell them it is absolutely O.K. to guard your negative status. This is our community, and we have seen too many people die in it. But we are not going to give up. And many of us never did give up. Yes, the crystal problem is real, and it’s true that people don’t protect themselves. We are going to have to change that.” He stared silently at the back of his hands for a moment. “And we will. I absolutely believe we will.” ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

A MOTHER'S STORY

BY PAUL RUDNICK

Parents would certainly deny it, but Canadian researchers have made a startling assertion: parents take better care of pretty children than they do ugly ones.

—*The Times.*

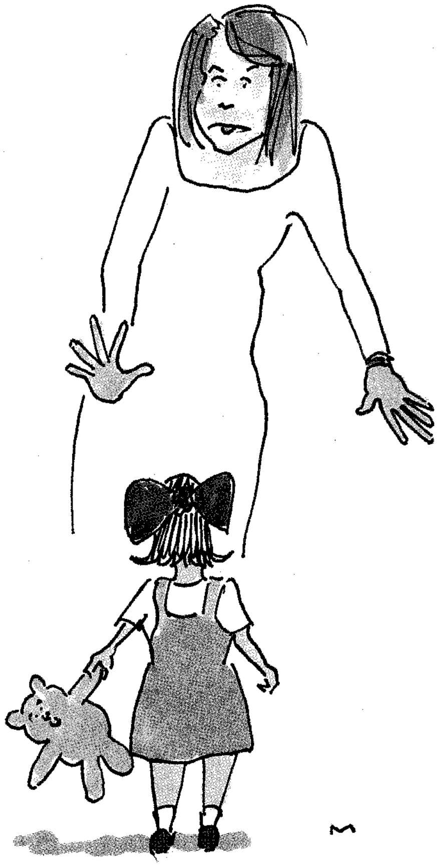
Until I saw the article in the *Times*, I'd felt so utterly alone. Was I the only one? The sole parent on earth who knew the anguish, the heart-shattering despair of— All right, I'll just say it, right out loud. I am the mother of an ugly child. She's not deformed or handicapped or odd; she's unattractive.

Even during my pregnancy, I'd had my suspicions. I remember peering at the ultrasound screen as my obstetrician told me, "Look, it's a brand-new life," and all I could say was "Fine, but why are we watching the Discovery Channel?" And then, after I gave birth, a nurse placed something on my chest and cooed, "Here's your little miracle," and I glanced down, bewildered, and asked, "Who ordered the veal scaloppine?"

For the next few years, when guests would drop by, I'd pretend that Lisa, as we'd named her, was a Duraflame log. As she grew older, I referred to her as our new cocker spaniel, although no one really believed this, because, of course, cocker spaniels are adorable. I did, however, begin to read to Lisa, and the titles included "The Four Little Pigs" and "The Little Engine That Settled."

When Lisa turned five, I was faced with an agonizing decision: where could we send her to school? Shockingly, there are no facilities in this country specifically designed for the education of ugly children, except for a few fringe programs dedicated to computers. So we were eventually forced to send her to school in England, where she was extremely popular. But I remained torn—she was an American child, and sooner or later, at least on vacations, she'd have to return home. The solution became obvious: a large box. I'd have the headmistress simply FedEx Lisa to our address, although whenever the package arrived there'd always be that terrible moment when my heart leaped, because I'd think, Someone's sent me a gift! Perhaps it's a fully outfitted wicker picnic basket, or a case of champagne! But then I'd hear that sound—the breathing.

I tried to be a generous, loving parent; whenever Lisa clawed at her paper bag I'd murmur, "Oh, but sweetheart, it's from Hermès." Still, there were those mornings when she'd want to leave the house in just jeans and a T-shirt, so I'd improvise. I'd say, "When we're in the park, let's play a wonderful game. Let's pretend that I'm a beautiful princess and you're a bench." And if strangers stared at us and asked, "Why are you sitting on that poor child and enjoying your lunch?," I'd defend Lisa, proudly declaring, "She's not poor!"

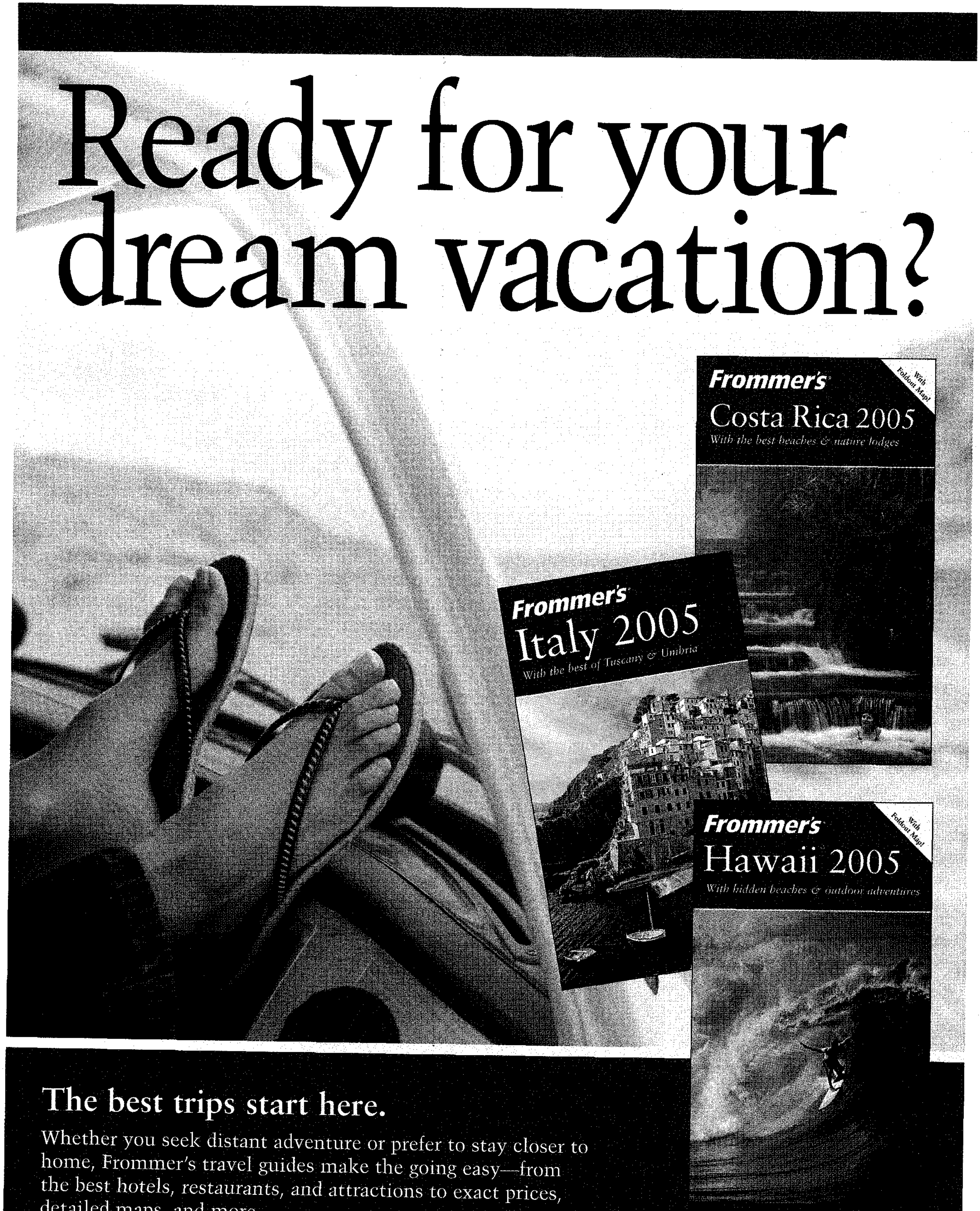


Our favorite holiday was, naturally, Halloween. I'd get all gussied up as a lovely ballerina, and Lisa would be my pancreas. We also liked to take long autumn drives through the countryside, to see the leaves change; whenever I'd spot a particularly vibrant red maple or a blaze of yellow, I'd cry, "Look!," and pause to listen for her delighted knock from the trunk. Malls and other public spaces could still be a challenge, but this was handily solved when I learned to play the concertina and bought Lisa a little felt hat and lederhosen. Still, perhaps it was Lisa's older sister, Renee, who suffered the most. Renee was stunningly gorgeous, and she always felt the most profound tenderness for the sibling she called her little brother. As a lesson in compassion, I'd say, "Who does Mummy love the most?," and Renee and Lisa would giddily shriek, "Me! Me!" And then I'd ask, "And who does Mummy pity?"

Despite all of this joy, this infinite maternal concern, I always knew that a dreaded era loomed: puberty. How could I make Lisa understand that, although she was a brilliant, vivacious young lady and the balm of my soul, dating would be impossible, even underwater? But then I hit upon a remedy. For Lisa's first formal dance, I arranged for her to be escorted by Bobo, an adolescent male grizzly bear. "It's just like Noah's ark!" I trilled, as I snapped their photo; Lisa was a bit apprehensive at first, until I pointed out that the arrangement was for only one night, and that they would both be muzzled. I'm pleased to report that the evening was a huge success, thanks to a few open garbage cans, a dab of lard behind Lisa's ear, and the fact that no one will ever know that I slipped Bobo five hundred dollars and got him drunk.

Blessedly, today Lisa is well over thirty and happily married to Jorge, our houseboy, who now has his green card, a Chelsea duplex, and one of Lisa's kidneys. And just the other day Lisa said to me, "Mom, it's really *inner* beauty that counts, isn't it? Isn't that what life's all about?" I took her face in my hands and I replied, "Yes, of course it is, my darling." And I smiled, because, thankfully, it's true—ugly kids will believe anything. ♦

MICHAEL CRAWFORD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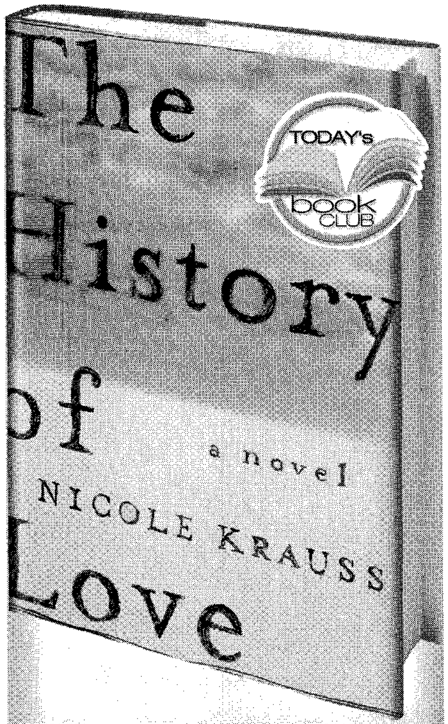

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THE SPORTING SCENE

TEEN SPIRIT

The sophomore season of America's first soccer celebrity.

BY BEN McGRATH

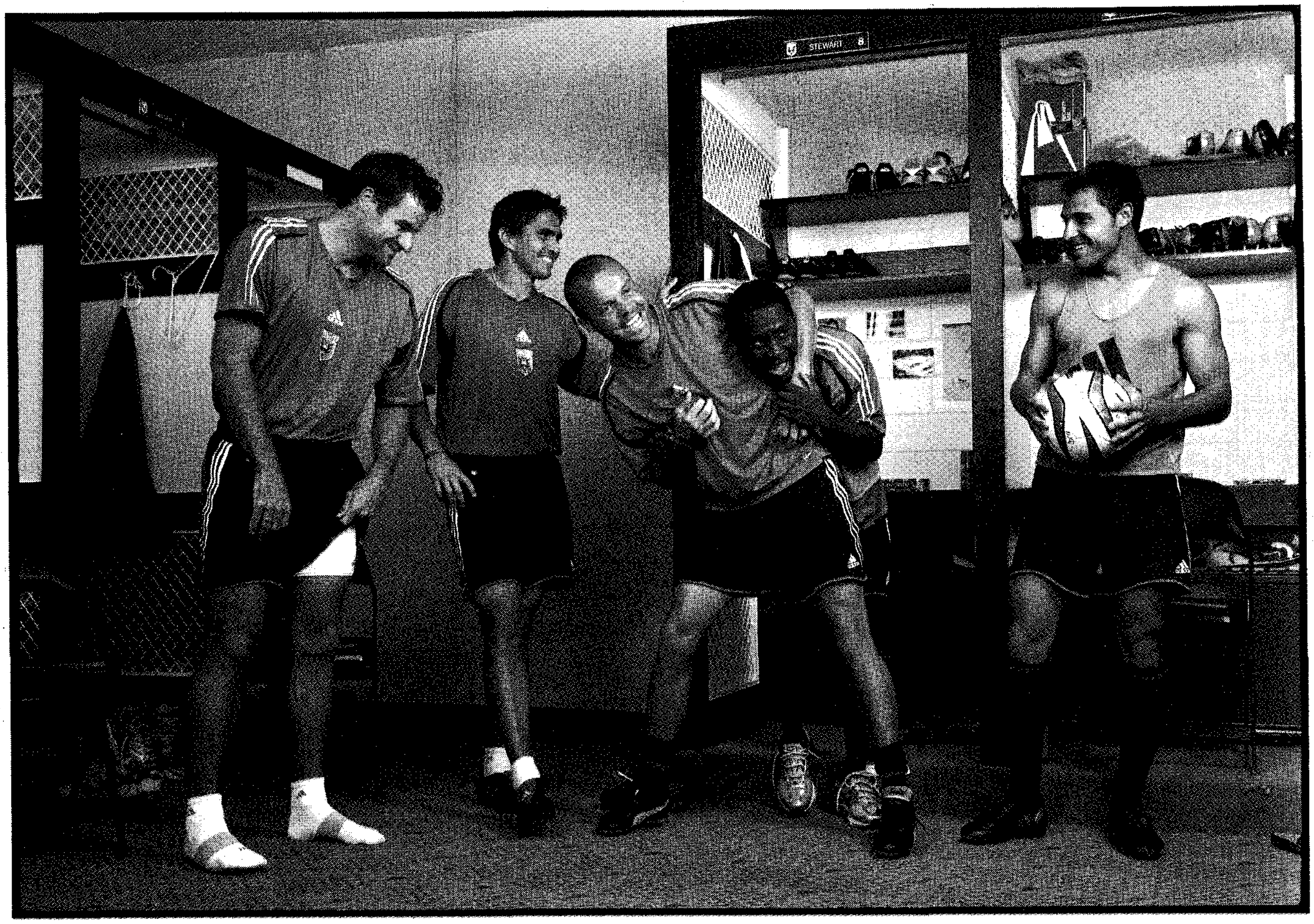
In certain company, talking about the state of American soccer, particularly professional soccer, can be a little like talking about urban renewal: a boom is always just around the corner. The infrastructure, for instance, is already in place, in the form of the more than seventeen million recreational soccer players in the country, nearly half of them under the age of eleven, and impressionable. All that is needed, enthusiasts argue, is a spark—some recognizable star power to excite the complacent American sports fan, with his short attention span and his expectations of high-scoring action and individual heroics. Soccer is a more remote, but also a more rewarding, pleasure: the world's game. If only it were on television, in prime time, like baseball.

In recent history, there have been several bold attempts to achieve this soccer awakening: signing the Brazilian legend Pelé, when he was thirty-four and past his peak, to play for the New York Cosmos, in 1975; luring the World Cup to the United States, in 1994, with the promise of a new professional organization, Major League Soccer, to follow. None of it has quite worked. After a brief burst, the interest subsides, and soccer resumes its mostly anonymous place somewhere below ice hockey and above lacrosse in the American sports consciousness. Still, optimism persists, and last year great new hope arrived in the form of a teen-age prodigy, from Ghana by way of Maryland. His youth and his winning looks—he is five feet six but broad-shouldered, with wide eyes and soft features—made him the perfect ambassador for a sport played by so many American boys and girls. Even his name, Freddy Adu, sounded auspicious.

The story of Adu's early years resembles that of many foreign-born star athletes: the uncanny, innate affinity for the sport (his mother likes to say that his eyes would light up when she held a soccer ball above his face in the crib); the barefoot games played in the street, amid shards of glass, from dawn to dusk. No coaches, no referees, no uniforms—just pure sport. Freddy was born Fredua Koranteng Adu, in Tema, Ghana, a fishing port twenty miles outside the capital city of Accra, on June 2, 1989. His parents, Maxwell and Emelia, were shopkeepers. Unlike Pelé, who, according to lore, filled socks with crumpled-up newspaper to fashion makeshift soccer balls in his home town of Três Corações, Adu was the frequent beneficiary of proper, factory-made balls—gifts from his mother's brother, who lived in the United States. He started playing with the older kids in the neighborhood when he was four, and soon they were calling him Pelé—after the other Pelé, Abedi Ayew Pelé, a Ghanaian who was named African Player of the Year three times in the early nineteen-nineties.

In the fall of 1997, when Freddy was eight and his brother, Fredua Akoto, or Fro, was six, the Adus came to the United States and settled with Emelia's brother in Gaithersburg, Maryland. (Maxwell left the family soon afterward, and is no longer in touch with them.) Within a few years, Freddy was being courted by a number of the big European clubs, including Milan's Inter, which offered the Adus seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, but, at Emelia's urging, Freddy decided to remain in the U.S. and complete his education. Then, at the age of fourteen, he signed a multiyear professional contract with Major League Soccer, making him the youngest pro in American team sports in more than a century. (In 1887, a pubescent Philadelphia A's pitcher named Fred Chapman took the mound for five forgettable innings, and was never heard from again.) When the signing was announced, at a televised press conference at Madison Square Garden, in November of 2003, Ivan Gazidis, the deputy commissioner of M.L.S., said of Adu, "He's the best young player in the world right now, not just in the United States."

The United States has never before had its own international men's soccer star. Most M.L.S. players earn about as much as New York City public-school teachers—a few even work second jobs to make ends meet—and the league imposes a maximum salary (two hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars) that is smaller than Major League Baseball's minimum. For Adu, who was still seen to represent a flight risk, an exception was made: five hundred thousand. In the months leading up to Adu's professional début, for Washington's D.C. United, last spring, he signed a million-dollar endorsement deal with Nike, went on MTV's daytime hit "T.R.L.," and taped a spot on Letterman (in which he performed a sort of Stupid Human Trick, removing and then putting on his T-shirt while balancing a soccer ball on the back of his neck). American Soccer had never enjoyed such visibility.



The relationship between Freddy Adu and his teammates is a mixture of jealousy and affection. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

"Freddy lives in a world bigger than soccer," Doug Hicks, D.C. United's vice-president of communications, and often Adu's chaperon, says. "All these things outside soccer—MTV, Nickelodeon—that's where soccer is headed. M.L.S. will eventually be the N.B.A. It will be the N.F.L. And Freddy is at the forefront. He is Tiger Woods. He's Michael Jordan."

I first met Adu one sunny day last June: his fifteenth birthday. In the previous two weeks, he had graduated from high school and scored his second professional goal—an impressive left-footed blast just underneath the crossbar from fifteen yards out, for which he was awarded M.L.S. Goal of the Week honors. It was an ordinary midseason training day, and Adu lagged behind his teammates as they filed across the street from R.F.K. Stadium, where D.C. United plays its home games, to a practice field. He was carrying the water jugs. As he joined everyone in doing calisthenics and warmup drills, he exhibited the self-conscious nonchalance—elbows bent, wrists loose, head rolling from side to side—of a typical adolescent jock. Emelia Adu sat in a black Lexus S.U.V., a gift from her son, just beyond the field, observing—and waiting to drive him home when it was over.

"Freddymania—it's like the Beatles," Hicks said, as the players on the field broke into smaller groups, forming circles for simultaneous games of keep-away. "In Tampa, during preseason, I saw one girl faint dead cold." He went on, "We're still very much in sales mode. We're used to having to pitch stories. But we're wary of a Brian Bosworth situation." He was referring to the flamboyant college football star (he went by the name Boz and wore a Mohawk) whose pro career ultimately collapsed under the weight of too many extracurricular distractions after he signed what was then the richest contract in Seattle Seahawks history, in 1987. "There's a fine line between more publicity and overexposure."

The team began scrimmaging, and Adu sprang to life. He darted this way and that, calling repeatedly for the ball. Offensively, Adu is a dynamic player, cutting or sidestepping abruptly in a direction not easily anticipated. His favorite move, which he tried several times (with little success), is the multiple stepover: a series of scissoring motions over

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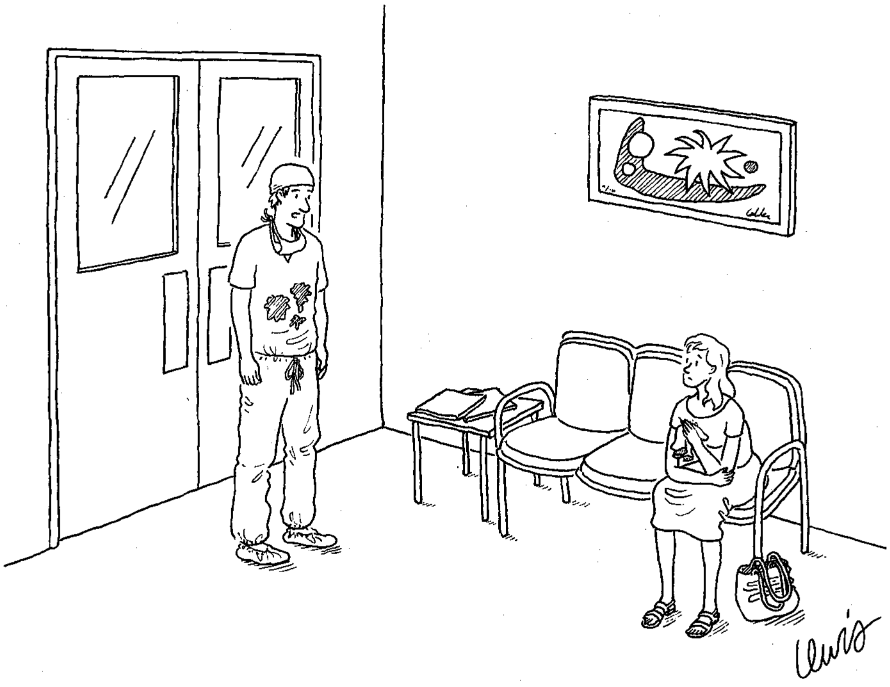


"If it's any consolation, he seemed like a bit of a jerk."

• •

the ball. "Off the ball," as they say, he is more often listless. Before playing professionally, Adu was typically the best player on the field and had rarely needed to focus on defense and positioning. But, at practice last June, "Freddy!" was the most common refrain—shouted often in exasperation, by teammates and coaches, when he wasn't where he was supposed to be. The relationship between Adu and his teammates is complicated, a mixture of jealousy, impatience, and affection. Early on, when criticized, he tended to be petulant and aloof. He sometimes ended up in the dirty-towels bin.

In honor of his birthday, Adu was given cleanup duty in the locker room. Then he walked across the hall for the other part of his daily routine: facing the media. ("He's a great interview—he's unscripted," Hicks had told me, before explaining the strictly enforced rules governing access to Adu: no on-field interviews, no telephone interviews.) At this, it quickly became evident, Adu excels. He is confident, maintaining eye contact, but also self-effacing—maybe the most polite fifteen-year-old alive. He has learned, for instance, to shrug off gracefully the perception—familiar and tired by now—that he might be older than his family claims. (*Sports Illustrated* conducted an investigation, and came up with no incriminating evidence.) Grinning, he said that the team's coach, Peter Nowak, began practice that morning by announcing that he wanted everyone to wish Freddy a happy twenty-seventh.

"When I first started, it was the coolest thing in the world, 'cause that's what every kid wants to do—you always want to be famous," Adu said, when asked to reflect on the celebrity life, a few months in. "When you get there, it's pretty cool, but after a while you're just, like, 'God, leave me alone.' "

Adu's American career began one Sunday during his fourth-grade year, when a classmate invited him to play in a club soccer game. "Freddy was wearing black jeans, an orange sweatshirt, and a Mickey Mouse hat," Nick Scrivens, one of the other boys on the field, and now Adu's best friend, recalls. "He never opened his mouth." He was also, by a large measure, the best player—faster, with better footwork and an unteachable instinct for finding openings—and Arnold Tarzy, the coach of the opposing team, sensed his potential immediately. He sought out Adu's family, and visited them at home. "I showed up at their door and told them, 'I will take care of him,' " he says. "It's a promise I'm still trying to keep." Tarzy became the first non-family member included in the protective inner circle that has come to be known, half in jest, as Team Adu. Freddy sometimes calls him Uncle.

Adu eventually joined a travelling team coached by Tarzy. He was its star forward, and as the team ventured farther afield so did his reputation. Broadly speaking, American soccer is known for being obsessively structured, conservative, and focussed on conditioning; in other countries, by contrast, individual creativity and flair tend to be more encouraged. Adu's style of play, having emerged in the unstructured environment of Ghanaian pickup games, more resembled that of the Brazilians or the French, with their traditionally strong sense of touch. He was a gifted trickster and ball juggler, so deft that he could appear, at times, as though he were dancing.

In 2001, Adu met John Ellinger, a coach with the U.S. Soccer Federation, who invited him to join the federation's residency program. Based in Bradenton, Florida, an hour south of Tampa, the program is housed at I.M.G. Academies, a hundred-and-ninety-acre complex owned by the sports agency International Management Group and devoted to churning out Division I and professional athletes in tennis, golf, baseball, soccer, and basketball. The soccer residents compete internationally as an Under-17 team and attend classes at the Edison Academic Center, situated in a strip mall in town, between a pizzeria and an optometrist's office. But, in some ways, the most crucial instruction at I.M.G. Academies takes place in a one-story building on campus called the Sports Performance Training Center. That was where, this winter, I met Steve Shenbaum, who conducts improvisational sessions as a way of improving athletes' social skills. Adu worked with Shenbaum occasionally when he was in the residency program, which served, in Adu's case, as a sort of finishing school—setting him at ease in public, encouraging him to enunciate. "I was an actor for fifteen years," Shenbaum said. (His credits include "American Pie 2," "Sabrina, the Teenage Witch," and "Winning London," with Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen.) His company, Game On, provides what is essentially media training.

Shenbaum described one of the improv games, Expert Speaker, that he likes to play with team-size groups, to help establish more natural-seeming conversational manners. The object is for the players to take turns as the featured guest on a talk show, pretending spontaneously to be an authority on any topic of the group's choosing—the more implausible the better. "I call it 'be untucked,'" Shenbaum said. "Not unpolished but untucked—loose, self-deprecating. So the group will pick a topic: butterflies. And you get a kid like Freddy Adu talking about how he's the world's best butterfly doctor, off the top of his head. You know, define that muscle a little bit. It's all about tweaking muscles—does this athlete need a dose of humility, or a dose of facial expression? It's like directing actors. You figure out where the strengths are, and turn the volume up."

With Adu, the training worked especially well. "The problem with him now is he's *too* polished," Shenbaum said. "It's just not natural. You take any phenom—Carmelo Anthony, Michelle Wie, Sidney Crosby, Alex Smith, and I work with them all—they're too young to come across as slick."

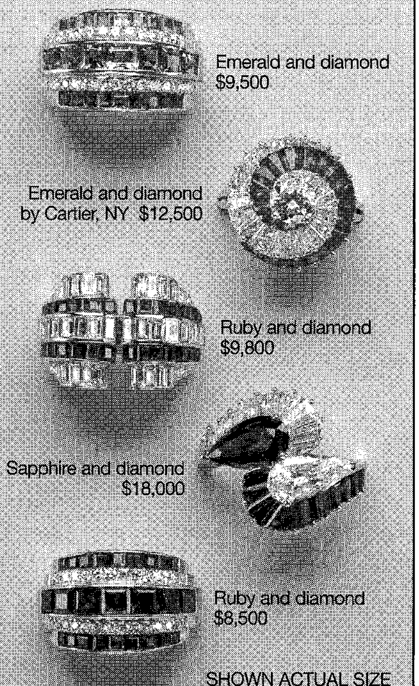
Across the hall, I found Trevor Moawad, who has been Adu's mental-conditioning coach since 2001. (He and Adu still speak on the phone regularly, and meet at least once a month.) Moawad was in the process of converting a digital recording to VHS. The recording, which he'd made two days earlier, of a scrimmage between D.C. United and the University of South Florida, tracked only Adu's movements, not the ball; its sheer boringness made clear the pitfalls of relying on an individual to sell the game of soccer to an American television audience that has grown up on "SportsCenter."

"I've got a hundred and twenty minutes of footage," Moawad said. "Warming up, playing the game, and after the game. So he can follow his body language. There's no perspective on the game, just him."

Moawad pointed to his file cabinets; two of the eight drawers were devoted exclusively to Adu—chronicling his initial homesickness, through bouts with bad language in his first semesters, and on up to the polished present. (Despite all this, Adu can still occasionally act like a kid: last September, he attended a keg party at the University of Maryland, which led D.C. United officials to register Adu at hotels on the road under the alias John Blutarsky, after John Belushi's character in "Animal House.") "Eventually, what you're trying to do in young athletes is establish good habits," Moawad said. "You can change a habit in four to six weeks if you have an awareness of where your area of weakness is. You become aware of it, and put a plan in place, with positive affirmations that are first person present tense. I'll give you a statement that we use with Freddy: 'I take setbacks as temporary and bounce back quickly.' You repeat and visualize and you affirm."

On the screen, after much inactivity, there was a sudden commotion—legs sliding into view from the left; two bodies colliding—and Adu was on the ground. Moawad said, "I also film him how he looks when he's down"—he looked to be in pain—"how he gets up, how he bounces back, all that stuff." Adu, in this case, wasn't going to be given the chance to recover; he was pulled from the game. "Good. Now you see the little things," Moawad said. "He shakes everyone's hand as he comes out of the game. Those are things that I'll point out as positives, even if he doesn't want to come out." Adu was walking slowly but assuredly, and slapping five with each of his teammates. "See? The body language is good. Just be aware, let your teammates know that you're sending good messages. Attitude is an all-the-time thing. So, like, this is something that I'm excited about. He's relaxed, got a smile, got his arm around Eskandarian"—Alecko Eskandarian, a twenty-two-year-old forward—"who's a little bit bummed. Now he's talking with Eskandarian. Those are things that you weren't seeing last year."

Moawad took me to a computer and showed me a different video, which he was in the process of editing. A series of images flashed: President Bush throwing out the first pitch of the 2001 World Series, Mike Tyson delivering a knockout punch, Doug Flutie connecting on a Hail Mary. "The first part of this video is basically reminding him, like, Hey, it's an unbelievable world, you're a pro athlete, and when you're a pro athlete you jump into a world of fantastic moments,"



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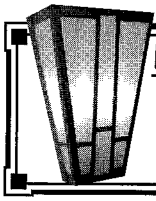

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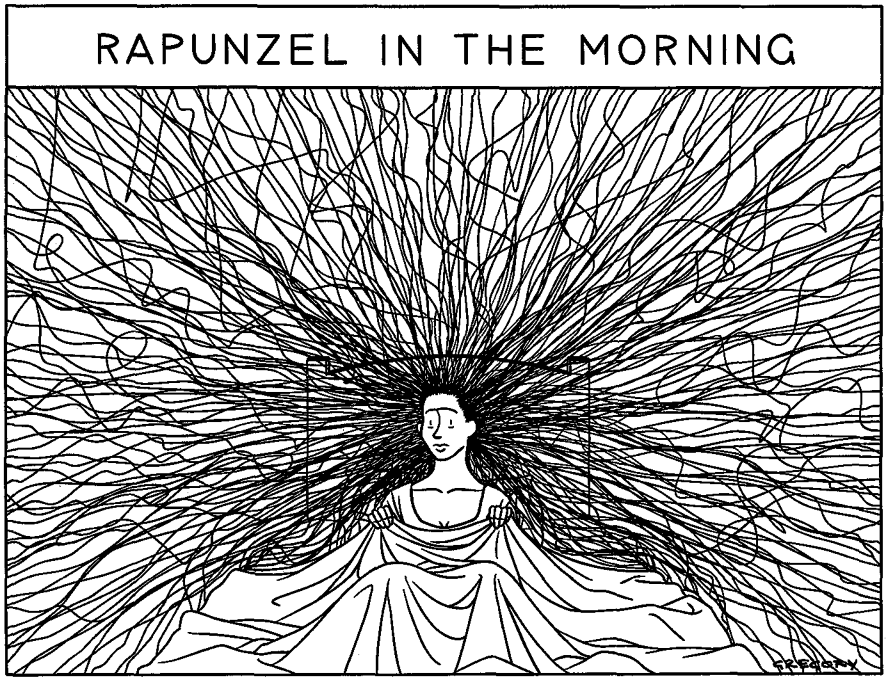
Moawad said. "You see Lance Armstrong, you see Pat Tillman, you see the faces on these guys. Freddy's an American athlete, he's grown up around American athletes. Much more than he's grown up watching soccer, he's watched baseball, basketball, football. You kind of put his face in there a little bit. Now we're building up into his highlights from Major League Soccer."

It is hard to think of a base that Moawad has left uncovered in the world of sports psychology—though he made a point of telling me that he shouldn't be called a sports psychologist. He has sought advice from Jennifer Capriati's agent, on where to look for the warning signs of adolescent angst, and spoken with "Tiger's people," for recommendations about coping with professional jealousy. He has even recruited as a mentor Jaleel White, the former child actor who played the nerd Steve Urkel on the sitcom "Family Matters." White is now twenty-eight years old, and a screenwriter. "He's one of the few people that navigated through a lot of money, a lot of notoriety," Moawad said. "So Jaleel spent some time with Freddy, talked about his first car, talked about continuing education. Jaleel said, 'Always have a book with you, always be reading, be developing yourself mentally, so you know what's going on in the world.' You know, so that you're not just locked up in video games."

On this last count, Adu may not have quite got the message. He told me, "I do have the time, but I just don't really like reading." And, when he gets a break from work, he and his friends play video games for hours. Often, they play FIFA Soccer, which presents the odd existential challenge for Adu of playing a game in which he is an official character. "The first time, I was, like, 'Wow, this is unbelievable'—and you're a little biased, too, because every time you get the ball you try to give it to yourself, try to score every goal," he said. (Adu objects to the way he was rated by the game's designers, however: "I'm faster than they said I am.") Nick Scrivens described one game in which Freddy opted to control England's national team and Scrivens chose D.C. United—a mismatch if ever there was one. Unsurprisingly, England won, but "Freddy Adu" starred in the losing effort. "Yeah, he"—the virtual Freddy Adu—"kept scoring every goal for Nick, and I was getting pissed off at myself in the game," Adu said.

Despite a few flashes of excitement, such as the Goal of the Week, Adu's first season was a bit of a letdown: after just six games, the Washington *Times* sports page led with the headline "FADING FREDDY." Adu's playing time, principally as a substitute, late in games, wasn't what he'd hoped, and D.C.'s coaches emphasized that he needed to learn to make fewer mistakes.


RAPUNZEL IN THE MORNING

"At this age, the fact that he can play—the fact that he can be on the field and not stand out—is amazing," Hicks had said while we watched practice on Adu's birthday early last season. It was true, and yet it was also indicative of a fundamental problem that would become more pronounced as the season progressed. You don't attract new fans—devoted, returning fans—by not standing out. Major League Soccer is about the tenth-best product of its kind, worldwide, on the order of the French Ligue Nationale de Basket, or the Korean Baseball Organization, and in a sense Freddy Adu, as a backup player for D.C. United, was turning out to be more like a young utility infielder for Seoul's Hyundai Unicorns than like Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan.

By the middle of summer, Adu had become skilled at working phrases like "I helped preserve the lead" into his postgame repertoire, which is universal spin, especially among forwards, for "I wish I had a bigger role to play." He appeared in the All-Star Game, but only as a special "commissioner's pick"—in other words, for marketing reasons. (The site of the game, announced just a month beforehand, was suspiciously convenient: R.F.K. Stadium.)

John Ellinger, Adu's former coach in Bradenton, told me, at one point, "I think he's struggling with the M.L.S. I don't think he's quite grasped the idea." Ellinger also seemed wary of the D.C. United emphasis on risk-aversion. "You have to give a creative player like that more room," he said.

The attendance at games featuring Adu last season was consistently greater, by an average of five thousand, than at those without him—an excellent return on M.L.S.'s half-million-dollar investment. But the effect, known informally around the league as "the Freddy factor," diminished in the second half of the season, as the novelty of watching a fifteen-year-old merely hold his own wore off. In Europe, skeptics began to dismiss Adu as a product of typical American hype. And while there was vindication when D.C. United won the M.L.S. championship, in November, the conventional story line had already begun to shift: whereas Freddy Adu was once America's great hope, now he was being repositioned as only the first

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in a long line of big things to come. On the Web, fans once committed to documenting Adu's precocious achievements started looking elsewhere; in January, as Adu's second season approached, a video started circulating on the Internet of the latest, hottest young thing: a nine-year-old Brazilian boy named Jean-Carlos Chera, who is four feet six inches tall and weighs seventy-seven pounds. In the video, which is five minutes long and accompanied by a stirring soundtrack, Jean-Carlos can be seen scoring one goal after another, in slow motion, on repeat, from far and near. It attracted the attention of several European clubs, and in March the Brazilian club champion Santos—Pelé's original team—successfully recruited him.

"I don't see in him what I saw in Freddy," Arnold Tarzy wrote in an e-mail, after watching the video. "Freddy at age 8 and 9 was much more smooth."

"Some of it looks computerized," Nick Scrivens said, sounding similarly protective of Adu's legacy. "If people think Freddy did bad last year, good. He's definitely going to open some eyes this year."

Adu spent the first two weeks of February in Bradenton, where D.C. United was participating in a sort of unofficial soccer spring training. At a charity event one Sunday, D.C. played an exhibition match against the U.S. Under-17 team—the kids currently in the residency program. About midway through the second half, Adu, as usual, got up off the bench and began to loosen up. Predictably, a large number of the heads in the stands turned to follow his wind sprints on the sideline—and therefore missed a D.C. goal. Adu finally subbed in at the seventy-second minute (out of ninety). The audience was full of young girls who shrieked every time he touched the ball, even if only to pass it off again without advancing on the goal. An older man sitting behind me sighed when it became apparent that the cheering would persist in this pattern, unaffected by the development of the play at large. "Yeah, but if he gets people interested . . . ," his friend offered, as consolation.

After the game, a cluster of reporters converged on Adu, who seemed especially upbeat. "I've been away from you guys for a while," he said. "Been in my off-season, kind of been relaxing, chilling. But, you know, I'm glad to be back. I mean, this is all part of my work, part of my job. I'm glad to be here, man. Glad to be here."

He said that he was feeling more confident than he was last season. "Now I can play my game, as opposed to at first not knowing where to be, and always trying to please the crowd," he said. "And, at the end of the game today, every single time I touched the ball I tried to pass it off to somebody—you know, not trying to do anything out of the ordinary. That's what Coach told me: 'Go in the game, just keep the ball moving.' "

A couple of days later, on the team's final day in Bradenton, D.C. United played a game against the MetroStars, whose home field is Giants Stadium. Two or three dozen people assembled on the wooden bleachers at field level to watch. Among the spectators was Bruce Arena, the head coach of the U.S. national team, and the person in charge of deciding whether Adu will play in the 2006 World Cup. During the game, a few other U.S. Soccer Federation coaches joined Arena along the sideline. They made idle talk: about an upcoming trip to Guatemala for the Under-17s, and about another hot young prospect in the system. "Actually, he's a great story," one of the coaches said. "His family left the civil war in Bosnia, and were essentially nomads in this country." It turned out that the entire family had got jobs as janitors at a nearby school, and that the kid had taken to playing in a park not two miles away. Finally, two years ago, someone had approached him and asked how old he was. "He said he was fourteen," the coach said. "Now, we just got him citizenship. Only problem is he's not too fast."

Adu entered at the start of the second half. At one point, the ball squirted ahead down the left side, and Adu took off after it, in a sprint. He gained possession and began carrying the ball down the wing. "Freddy, *go* somewhere," one coach muttered. Then, rather than making a move, Adu lobbed a crossing pass over the middle, unsuccessfully. A few minutes later, a new opportunity arose. Adu took the ball near the center of the field, deep in enemy territory. He accelerated, stopped, and then veered sharply to the left, across the middle about twenty yards out. After a few unsuccessful feints—head fakes, accompanied by a lone step-over—he pulled up, and passed the ball back safely. "Oh, Freddy, *do* something," the coach said wearily.

D.C.'s home opener, against the Chicago Fire, took place on the second Saturday in April. There were nineteen thousand people in attendance, a better than average crowd for M.L.S., but almost six thousand fewer than had shown up for last season's opener—Adu's début. D.C. United now has to share R.F.K. Stadium with the Washington Nationals, the new major-league baseball team, while the Nationals' own stadium is being built. As a result, R.F.K.'s interior looked like a construction site: the baseball-to-soccer conversion requires shifting portions of the grandstand, and the result is that a gigantic dirt pit, cluttered with debris, is visible beyond one of the goals. Before the game, there was a ceremony to present the 2004 championship banner; unfurled, the banner was dwarfed by a giant Nationals emblem hanging to its left. If this, the home opener in the tenth-anniversary season of what Doug Hicks calls the "most successful organization in the history of American soccer," was any indication, the revolution is still a long way off.

Adu was called into the game as a sub in minute sixty-two, with the score tied at one, and, predictably, the crowd gave its loudest cheer of the evening, except for the cheer after D.C.'s goal. Shortly afterward, while receiving a pass, Adu tried an unconventional move, flicking the ball over his head with the back of his left leg, and sending it toward the corner, where he chased it down. A few minutes later, he tried another fancy maneuver, unsuccessfully, and a reporter in the press box said, "Too cute, Freddy. Keep it simple."

The game ended with the teams tied at 1–1, a typical result in professional soccer. (Last season, a third of all M.L.S. games ended in a draw; D.C. United took the championship despite winning just eleven of its thirty regular-season games.) It had been another uneventful outing for Adu, but before leaving the field he strode purposefully over to the far side and hugged three of the opposing players: good body language.

In the basement, outside the locker room, I ran into Bruce Arena, and asked him about Adu's development. He looked pained, as though I were a cop writing him a ticket, and said, "He is not a finished product at this point. . . . He's feeling his way into the professional ranks." How about the World Cup? "Guys that play fifteen minutes a game aren't national-team players," he said.

Inside the locker room, Adu wandered out of the shower in flip-flops and a white towel. Unlike last season, the reporters weren't all hovering in front of his stall; they were waiting to talk to Alecko Eskandarian, who had failed to convert on an open-net opportunity that would have won the game. Adu quietly put on a pair of diamond earrings, jeans, and a shirt, and eventually a reporter—from a children's magazine—approached. Adu was a little slow to settle into his smooth media persona, and, when asked how he felt now that he was no longer a rookie, he replied while still looking down at the ground. "I just don't care anymore," he said. "I don't care about what anybody thinks about me anymore." Then he snapped to, and charmingly answered the remaining questions—Who's your hero? What was your favorite school subject?—on autopilot.

Soon, Adu will turn sixteen, which will mean that he is eligible at last for a driver's license. ("I can't wait until we're driving Ferraris," Nick Scrivens says.) Later this year, Adu's brother, Fro, who is thirteen and also a promising young athlete, hopes to join the residency program in Bradenton. In the meantime, the boys and Emelia have moved into a big new house in nearby Rockville, with a fully equipped basement rec room. There, on the plasma-screen TV, with surround sound, Adu and his friends will continue to play video soccer, and the virtual Freddy Adu, unconstrained by coaches and the burden of so much expectation, will remain frozen in time, a budding international star, hogging the ball, scoring goals against England. ♦

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THE SPY WHO LOVED US

The double life of Time's Saigon correspondent during the Vietnam War.

BY THOMAS A. BASS

"Here is Pham Xuan An now," *Time's* last reporter in Vietnam cabled the magazine's New York headquarters on April 29, 1975. "All American correspondents evacuated because of emergency. The office of *Time* is now manned by Pham Xuan An." An filed three more reports from Saigon as the North Vietnamese Army closed in on the city. Then the line went dead. During the following year, with An serving as *Time's* sole correspondent in postwar Vietnam, the magazine ran articles on "The Last Grim Goodbye," "Winners: The Men Who Made the Victory," and "Saigon: A Calm Week Under Communism." An was one of thirty-nine foreign correspondents working for *Time* when the Saigon bureau was closed and his name disappeared from the masthead, on May 10, 1976.

Recognized as a brilliant political analyst, beginning with his work in the nineteen-sixties for Reuters and then for the New York *Herald Tribune* and *The Christian Science Monitor*, and, finally, as a *Time* correspondent for eleven years, Pham Xuan An seemed to do his best work swapping stories with colleagues in Givral's café, on the old Rue Catinat. Here he presided every afternoon as the best news source in Saigon. He was called "Dean of the Vietnamese Press Corps" and "Voice of Radio Catinat"—the rumor mill. With self-deprecating humor, he preferred other titles for himself, such as "*docteur de sexologie*," "*professeur coup d'état*," "Commander of Military Dog Training" (a reference to the German shepherd that always accompanied him), "Ph.D. in revolutions," or, simply, General Givral.

We now know that this is only half the work An did as a reporter, and not the better half. An sent the North Vietnamese a steady stream of secret military documents and messages written in invisible ink, but it was his typed dispatches, now locked in Vietnam's intelligence archives and known to us only through secondhand reports, which will undoubtedly rank as his chef d'œuvre. Using a Hermes typewriter bought specially for him by the North Vietnamese intelligence service, An wrote his dispatches, some as long as a hundred pages, at night. Photographed and transported as undeveloped rolls of film, An's reports were run by courier out to the Cu Chi tunnel network that served as the Communists' underground headquarters. Every few weeks, beginning in 1952, An himself would leave his Saigon office, drive twenty miles northwest to the Ho Bo woods, and descend into the tunnels to plan Communist strategy. From Cu Chi, An's dispatches were hustled under armed guard to Mt. Ba Den, on the Cambodian border, driven to Phnom Penh, flown to Guangzhou (Canton), in southern China, and then rushed to the Politburo in North Vietnam. The writing was so lively and detailed that General Giap and Ho Chi Minh are reported to have rubbed their hands with glee on getting these dispatches from Tran Van Trung—An's code name. "We are now in the United States' war room!" they exclaimed, according to members of the Vietnamese Politburo.

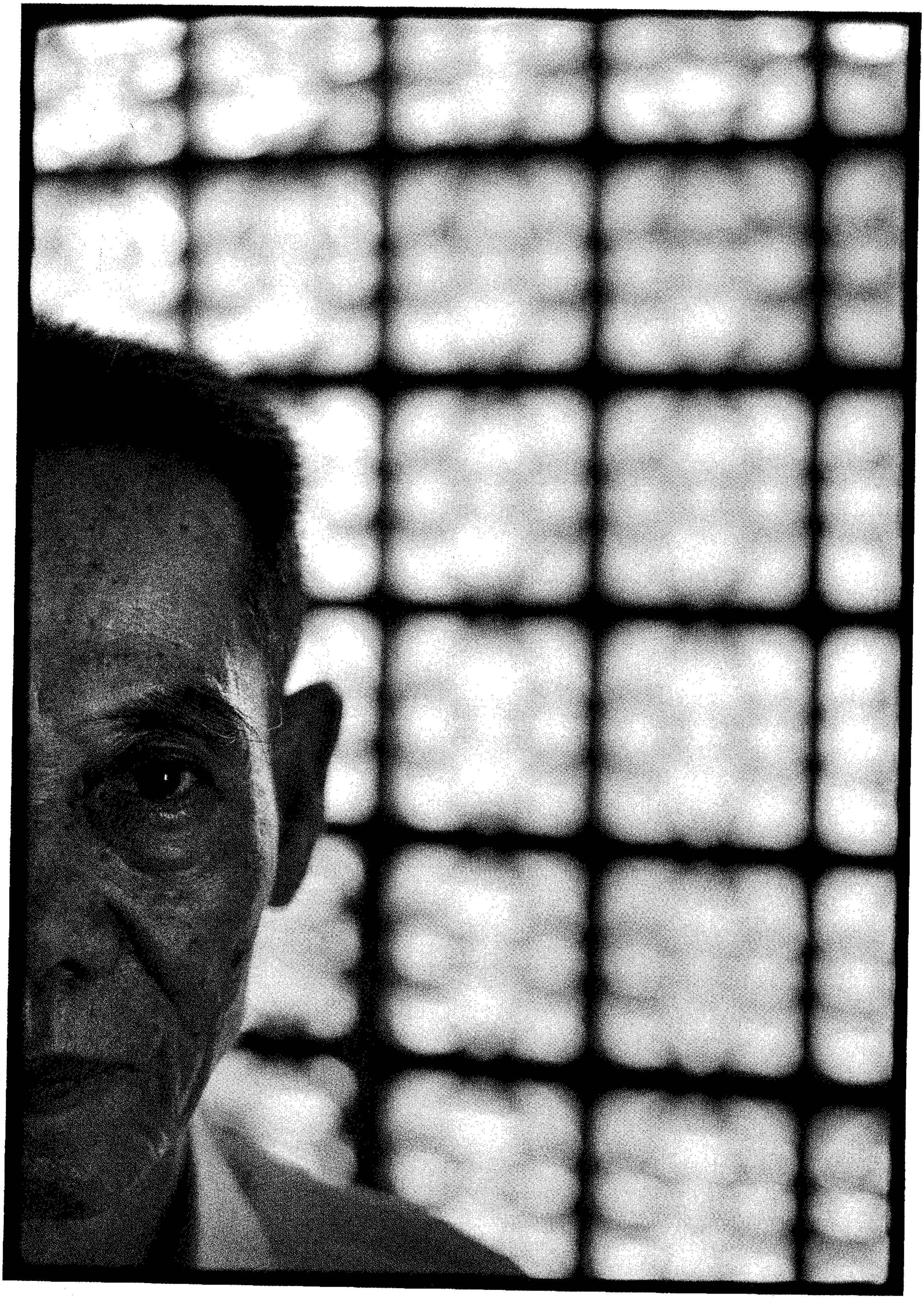
As Saigon fell to the Communists, An, like his fellow-correspondents, was hoping to be evacuated to the United States. Vietnam's military intelligence agency planned to continue his work in America. The Politburo knew there would be a war-after-the-war, a bitter period of political maneuvering in which the United States launched covert military operations and a trade embargo against Vietnam. Who better to report on America's intentions than Pham Xuan An? In the last days of the war, An's wife and their four children were airlifted out of Vietnam and resettled in Washington, D.C. An was anxiously awaiting instructions to follow them, when word came from the North Vietnamese Politburo that he would not be allowed to leave the country.

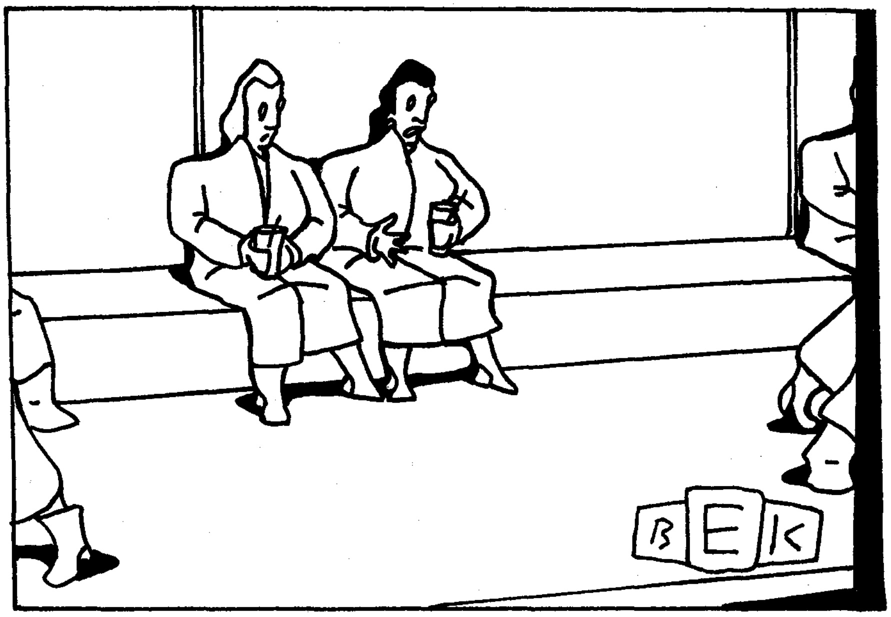
An was named a Hero of the People's Armed Forces, awarded four military-exploit medals, and elevated to the rank of brigadier general. He was also sent to a reëducation camp and forbidden to meet Western visitors. His family were brought back to Vietnam, returning a year after they left. The problem with Pham Xuan An, from the perspective of the Vietnamese Communist Party, was that he loved America and Americans, democratic values, and objectivity in journalism. He considered America an accidental enemy who would return to being a friend once his people had gained their independence. An was the Quiet Vietnamese, the representative figure who was at once a lifelong revolutionary and an ardent admirer of the United States. He says he never lied to anyone, that he gave the same political analyses to *Time* that he gave to Ho Chi Minh. He was a divided man of utter integrity, someone who lived a lie and always told the truth.

"An's story strikes me as something right out of Graham Greene," says David Halberstam, who was friends with An when he was a *Times* reporter in Vietnam. "It broaches all the fundamental questions: What is loyalty? What is patriotism? What is the truth? Who are you when you're telling these truths?" He adds, "There was an ambivalence to An that's almost impossible for us to imagine. In looking back, I see he was a man split right down the middle."

In his 1965 book on Vietnam, "The Making of a Quagmire," Halberstam described An as the linchpin of "a small but first-rate intelligence network" of journalists and writers. An, he wrote, "had the best military contacts in the country." Now that Halberstam knows An's story, does he bear him any grudges? "No," he says,

Pham Xuan An was the press corps' most trusted source. He also helped plan the Tet Offensive. Photograph by James Nachtwey.





"He wouldn't let me in, he wouldn't let me stay, he wouldn't let me out."

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echoing the opinion of almost all of An's former colleagues. "It's a story full of intrigue, smoke and mirrors, but I still think fondly of An. I never felt betrayed by An. He had to deal with being Vietnamese at a tragic time in their history, when there was nothing but betrayal in the air."

Ho Chi Minh City—or Saigon, as it is still commonly called—is a single-mindedly commercial place. Lined with pushcarts and venders selling everything from soup to CDs, the streets are roaring rivers of Chinese two-stroke motorcycles. The exhaust fumes are so thick that Saigon's famously beautiful women have started covering their faces with scarves. "We are all Muslims now," says Viet, my Honda man, on the back of whose motorcycle I travel around the city.

Approaching An's house—a villa in District 3, a densely settled neighborhood near the train station—we pass an intersection full of motorcycle-repair shops and come to a street that specializes in selling tropical fish, including the Siamese fighting fish that An admires. I tug on the bell that hangs on his green metal gate. The dogs start barking, and I peer through the grille to see An shuffling down the driveway. A wispy figure, he wears a striped short-sleeved shirt with a ballpoint pen in the pocket, gray trousers flapping around his legs, and rubber sandals. He arrives winded but smiling, and greets me with a handshake that involves only the tips of his fingers. He was recently admitted to the hospital with a collapsed lung, the result, perhaps, of a lifetime of smoking Lucky Strikes, but General Givral, with his full-toothed grin, looks, at seventy-eight, as puckish as ever.

I had last visited An in the early nineties, while writing a book on Amerasians—the children of American soldiers and their Vietnamese lovers. When it was published, I sent him a copy, and I sent him other books when mutual friends visited Vietnam. An knew that I was interested in hearing his story. He was a gracious host to the visitors who were allowed to see him after Vietnam adopted *doi moi*, its version of perestroika, in the late eighties. He would spend hours explaining Vietnamese history and culture. But there was one subject on which he was silent: his life as a spy. It looked as if he would be a sphinx to the end, whether out of loyalty to his friends or fear of government reprisals. In January of 2004, though, I received a message that he might finally be willing to talk, not in formal interviews but in friendly conversations. These began at Tet, the lunar New Year, and resumed later for another couple of weeks at the onset of the rainy season, in May. (I saw An again for a few days in March of 2005.)

An leads me through his garden, a tropical enclave lush with star fruit and bushberry trees. It is perfumed with frangipani and splashed with color from the flowering apricot blossoms and orchids. Staring at us from cages under the trees are a hawk and An's three fighting cocks. We stop in the middle of the garden to admire a porcelain statue of one of An's beloved German shepherds. An says he learned about using dogs for intelligence work from C.I.A. agent Colonel Edward Lansdale—the supposed model for Graham Greene's Quiet American. "I trained my dog so that he could alert me when the police were searching people's houses, even a kilometre away," An says. "He was a good spy."

An's wife, Thu Nhan, works in front of the house, sweeping the porch with a short-handled broom. She is a pleasant, round-faced woman with her hair tucked into a bun. Ten years younger than An, she is busily cleaning before the rush of visitors who will be coming for Tet, including their daughter, who lives in California. Hanging on the porch and from poles set in the driveway are the cages where An keeps his laughing thrushes, golden-fronted leafbirds, magpies, canaries, and other songbirds. A blue Indian mynah with a yellow bill announces, in Vietnamese, "Grandfather, telephone call for you!" The bird is mimicking the voice of An's grandson, who lives here along with An's three grown sons.

We kick off our shoes and enter the large room that used to serve as An's office and library, as well as the reception and dining room. Lining the far wall are the glass-faced shelves that hold his books. A Chinese landscape painting hangs above a green upholstered sofa and chairs. Below the open windows sits a fish tank that holds the third component in An's menagerie. Dogs are loyal, he says. Birds are always hopping around in their cages, keeping busy. "Fish teach you to keep your mouth shut. Unfortunately, while I was in the hospital most of my fish died."

The room has been changed since I last visited. In the alcove near the front door, in place of An's desk and filing cabinets and the piles of magazines and papers, which used to reach toward the ceiling, sits his son's piano. Later, I discover what happened to An's office when he and I walk past the family altar and out through the kitchen into the driveway at the back of the house. "Here's where my wife threw all my papers," he says, pointing to two gray filing cabinets and a desk piled with yellowing documents. All that protects them from the elements is a narrow plastic roof.

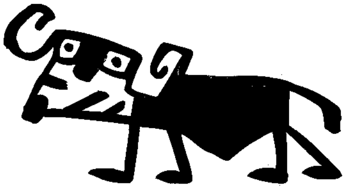
As we stare at the papers heaped in the driveway, An cracks a joke. "My wife tells me it's time to make room for the younger generation, but I can't die yet," he says. "There's nowhere for me to go. Hell is reserved for crooks, but there are so many of them in Vietnam, it's full."

An has pendulous ears, a high, square-domed forehead, close-cropped dark hair, and lively brown eyes. His left eye is slightly larger than the right, as if he were simultaneously taking both the long and the short view of the world's affairs. In the pictures of him from the fifties, showing him wearing narrow suits, white shirts, and black trousers, An looks like one of the nice, clean-cut young men who joined fraternities and mastered social drinking. He was taller than the average Vietnamese, a scrappy young boxer and swimmer, who once thought, after failing his school exams for the second year in a row, that he might have to become a gangster. He doesn't want to talk about himself, he says—there is too much to remember. "It's too difficult. And too long. And I am old." Then, leaning forward, he begins talking about himself, recalling in minute detail scenes from fifty years ago. He gesticulates with his fingers, which are long-boned and nearly translucent with age. He shapes the air in front of him as if it were a doughy ball, taking a punch at it from time to time. He divides his remarks into Confucian triads and pentads or draws a flowing curve that represents one of the *déesses*, the protective goddesses to whom he credits his success in life. An can talk for hours about world events, drawing parallels, for example, between Vietnam and the Iraq war (he says techniques first developed in Asia have been moved to the desert) or evaluating the world's intelligence services ("The Americans are masters at gathering intelligence, but they don't know what to do with it").

Pham Xuan An was born in the Vietnamese Year of the Cat, at the Hour of the Buffalo, on September 12, 1927, twenty miles northeast of Saigon, in the Bien Hoa psychiatric hospital. At the time, this was the only medical facility in Cochin China open to Vietnamese. As the firstborn son of a *cadre supérieur*, an educated member of the colonial administration, An had the rare honor of receiving a French colonial birth certificate.

Originally from Hai Duong, the heart of North Vietnam, in the densely populated Red River Delta lying between Hanoi and the coast, An's great-grandfather, a silver- and goldsmith, was recruited by the Nguyen dynasty to make medals for the royal court at Hue, in central Vietnam. An's grandfather, who rose through the mandarinate to become a teacher and the director of a primary school for girls, wears one of these gold medals on his chest in the photograph which stands as the centerpiece of An's family altar. Given to him by the Emperor, the large tulip-shaped medal, called the *kim khanh*, signifies that An's grandfather held a rank equivalent to that of a secretary in the government. Later, An shows me a picture of himself as a baby with this medal hanging around his neck. I ask if he still owns it. "It was sent to Ho Chi Minh for the Gold Campaign," he says, referring to the huge bribe that Ho paid the Chinese occupation forces in 1945 to persuade them to withdraw from North Vietnam after the Second World War.

An's father, trained as an engineer at the university in Hanoi, worked as a cadastral surveyor, establishing property lines and tax rolls in Vietnam's southern frontier. He laid out roads in Saigon and canals through the U Minh Forest, along the Gulf of Siam. While surveying in Cambodia, he met An's mother, another emigrant from the North. She was an industrious woman whose second-grade education allowed her to read and write. The work of a colonial surveyor in what was then the wilds of South Vietnam involved press-ganging peasants into carrying chains through the Mekong marshlands and building towers in the jungle to establish sight lines. "When you do land surveying and build canals and roads, you see the poor Vietnamese workers eking out their living," An says. "You see the French system of forced labor, beatings, and other abuses. The only way to oppose these abuses is to fight for independence." He adds, "The Americans did the same thing in 1776. My family was always patriotic in their desire to remove the French from Vietnam."



In his early childhood, An was living on a sampan in the cajeput forests at the southern tip of Vietnam when he was swept overboard during a typhoon and nearly drowned. He was sent to stay with his grandparents in Hue, returned to the South on the death of his grandmother, and sent north again when he flunked his exams in the third grade. His father separated him from his siblings and exiled him to Truoi, in the countryside, where life among the peasants was supposed to scare him into working harder in school. Instead, An delighted in playing hooky and larking around the countryside. When he flunked his exams again, he was caned by his father and moved back to Saigon for a stricter regimen.

An fell in love with Saigon, which at the time was a lazy colonial outpost surrounded by rubber plantations. He spent hours along the Saigon River, swinging in the banyan trees and jumping into the water. He made friends with the workers in the Ba Son shipyard, who cast fanciful coins for him to play with. He rode the electric train to Cholon, the Chinese district, and then rode back to the movie theatre near the bridge at Dakao. Here he watched all the films with Johnny Weissmuller swinging through the trees as Tarzan. "It was a beautiful dream of freedom in the jungle," An says of those movies. "I thought under Communism I would live like Tarzan. I put this dream into the revolution."

"Look at Tarzan!" An exclaims. "What does he have? Only his loincloth." This is Communism as a pure state of nature, a Rousseauian idyll. It is the high-school-philosophy version of Communism, which An acquired from books sent to students in the colonies by the French Socialist Party. "Yes, I am a Communist," he says. "Communism is a very beautiful theory, the most human theory. The teaching of God, the Creator, is the same. Communism teaches you to love each other, not kill each other. The only way to do this is for everyone to become brothers, which might take a million years. It is utopian, but it is beautiful."

An the political analyst knows that Communism was responsible for millions of deaths in the twentieth century, and he knows intimately the limits of the Communist regime under which he lives. But An the patriot made a choice when he was young to fight for an independent Vietnam, and the most effective force in leading this struggle against the Japanese, French, Americans, Chinese, Cambodians, and other invaders of his divided country was the Communists. "Here in Vietnam, which organization did you have to join in order to carry on the fight for your country?" he asks. "You had no other choice but to join the Communist Party."

An was an eighteen-year-old high-school student at the Collège de Can Tho, in the Mekong Delta, when he dropped out of school, in 1945, to enlist in a Vietminh training course. For more than a hundred recruits there were only fifty weapons, some left over from the First World War. Trainees had to pick up spent cartridges to make new bullets. Though he was involved in fighting first the Japanese and then the French, An dismisses this experience as little more than running errands. But a government Web site, recounting his activities as a Hero of the People's Armed Forces, describes An as "a national defense combatant who participated in all battles in the western region of South Vietnam."

By 1947, An had left his position as a platoon leader, involved mainly in propaganda, and moved back to Saigon to care for his father, who would have a lung removed and spend the next two years in the hospital with tuberculosis. An organized student demonstrations in Saigon, initially against the French and then against the Americans. He worked as a secretary for the Caltex oil company until, in 1950, he passed the exam to become a French customs inspector.

During the Tet New Year celebration in 1952, An was summoned into the jungle north of Saigon to meet the Communist officials who were setting up C.O.S.V.N.—the Central Office for South Vietnam. C.O.S.V.N. would lead the war against the Americans, who, even before the end of the First Indochina War, in 1954, were beginning to replace the French as the primary enemy. An was excited about this call to the war zone, where he hoped to join his sister, who had moved to the jungle three years earlier to become "the Voice of Nam Bo," a radio broadcaster for the Communist network. An visited her sometimes, taking her food or medicine, and staying overnight in the Vietminh tunnel network, where the cooking fires were vented through termite mounds in order to evade the French spotter planes that flew overhead. (In 1955, An's sister moved to North Vietnam to work for the state-run coal mines.)

An was disappointed to learn that he wouldn't be joining his sister in the jungle but, instead, was being recruited to work as a spy in Vietnam's newly established military intelligence service. "I was the first recruit," he says. An found his new assignment ignoble. Spying is the work of hunting dogs and birds of prey, he says. "I had been beaten by the riot police during student demonstrations in Saigon, and I had no desire to be a stool pigeon or an informer."

The first problem An confronted on slipping back into Saigon as a newly recruited spy was how to avoid being drafted into the French colonial forces. To practice the English that he was learning at the United States Information Service, he volunteered his services as a press censor at the central post office. Here he was told to black out the dispatches written for British and French newspapers by Graham Greene, a "troublemaker" who the French assumed was working for British intelligence during his frequent visits to Vietnam.

An was formally inducted into the Communist Party in 1953, at a ceremony in the U Minh Forest presided over by Le Duc Tho. Tho, who was in charge of the southern resistance against the French, would later spend four years negotiating with Henry Kissinger at the Paris peace talks. Tho's younger brother, Mai Chi Tho, as the head of security for the Communist forces in the South, was An's boss.

In spite of his freelance work for the French intelligence agency, the Deuxième Bureau, An was drafted in 1954. To avoid getting shot during the waning days of the French colonial war in Indochina, An played on the family connections by which business gets done in Vietnam. He asked a cousin, Captain Pham Xuan Giai, for help. Giai, who commanded G5, the psychological-warfare department of the Army general staff, made An an adjutant, the highest-ranking noncommissioned officer, and put him to work at Army headquarters on the Rue Gallieni, near Cholon.

This is where Colonel Edward Lansdale found An when he came to offer his services—and money—to Captain Giai. Lansdale, a former advertising man and an expert in psychological warfare, had been sent to run the C.I.A.'s covert operations in Vietnam. Arriving in the country soon after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Lansdale found G5 and the rest of the old colonial military apparatus in a shambles. They were totally demoralized, with no idea what to do with themselves, until Lansdale and his innocuously titled Saigon Military Mission began turning South Vietnam into a country, complete with an army, a President, and a flag.

Finding a promising student in the young Pham Xuan An, Lansdale and his colleagues began teaching him the tradecraft that he would employ in his next twenty years as a Communist spy. "I am a student of Sherman Kent," An says, referring to the Yale professor who helped found the C.I.A. Strategic intelligence, Kent wrote in his classic text, "Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy" (1949), is a "reportorial job" based on studying the "personalities" of world leaders. "It must know of their character and ambitions, their opinions, their weaknesses, the influences which they can exert, and the influences before which they are frail. It must know of their friends and relatives, and the political, economic, and social milieu in which they move."

Pham Xuan An, the psyops intelligence agent, was beginning to acquire the "reportorial" method that he would later employ so brilliantly as Pham Xuan An the *Time* correspondent. "People usually have one career, while I had two, the job of following the revolution and the job of being a journalist," An told the writer Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hai, who has published a Vietnamese monograph about him. "These two professions were very contradictory, but also very similar. The intelligence job involves collecting information, analyzing it, and jealously keeping it secret, like a cat covering its droppings. The journalist, on the other hand, collects information, analyzes it, and then publishes it to the world."

As a quadruple agent moonlighting for France's Deuxième Bureau, working for his cousin's indigenous Vietnamese intelligence organization and its C.I.A. sponsor, and reporting to his

Communist handlers, An was beginning to live along the edge of his own personal nightmare. "I was never relaxed for a minute," he says. "Sooner or later as a spy, you'll be captured, like a fish in a pond. I had to prepare myself to be tortured. That was my likely fate."

It was scant solace that most of An's colleagues in G5 were in a similar predicament. "When we weren't spying on each other, we smoked opium and played together as friends," An says. "That was just the way things worked. I had to compartmentalize." He acknowledges that it was hard to do. "But you can't kill all the time. When the war was over, these were the people I would have to live with."

It was Mai Chi Tho and Muoi Huong, An's case officer, who decided to send him to the United States to be trained as a journalist. Muoi Huong, in an interview with the Vietnamese newspaper *Thanh Nien,* said that he got the idea to make An a journalist from Ho Chi Minh, who himself had worked as a reporter. It was the perfect cover for a spy, granting him access to obscure places and elevated people. The plan was approved at the highest levels of the Vietnamese Politburo, but it took several years to execute. An's father was dying. An won a government scholarship which was rescinded and given to someone who was better connected. Then his visa was blocked by French-trained administrators who didn't like the idea of sending a Vietnamese student to the United States. The Communist Party had a hard time finding enough money. Finally, Mai Chi Tho scraped together eighty thousand dong, which, at the time, was worth about a thousand dollars. This was sufficient to buy An's airplane ticket to America and four new suits of clothing. An's father died in his arms in September, 1957. A month later, An arrived in Costa Mesa, California, to enroll as a freshman at the local community college.

An was a thirty-one-year-old Communist spy, a retired customs officer, and a psywar specialist when he began studying at Orange Coast College, which had been recommended to him by an American adviser in Vietnam. He was possibly the first Vietnamese to live in Orange County. (It is now home to a hundred and fifty thousand Vietnamese.) Called Confucius by his classmates, An studied political science, American government, economics, sociology, psychology, Spanish, and journalism. He chaperoned eighteen-year-old coeds to the beach and spent a lot of time working on *The Barnacle*, the school newspaper, for which he wrote occasional articles, such as a movie review of "The Quiet American"—the

Pham Xuan An (lower left) and American correspondents at a Saigon military briefing. Photograph by Horst Faas.

first, anti-Communist version of Graham Greene's book. Finding the movie potentially confusing, An recommended that it "not be shown in Vietnam."

An describes his two years in the United States, which included internships at the Sacramento *Bee* and the United Nations, as "the only time in my life when I wasn't anxious." (His travels across America were financed by the Asia Foundation, which was later revealed to be a C.I.A. front.) He fell in love with America and he fell in love with an American, Lee Meyer, a lithe blonde who was his editor and writing coach at *The Barnacle*. "She knew I loved her, but I never told her," An says. "We Vietnamese never tell what we really feel." An's sunny years in California were the darkest time in the history of the southern Vietminh, the Communists who had remained below the seventeenth parallel when Vietnam was divided in 1954. By 1959, as many as eighty-five per cent of these Vietminh fighters, numbering about sixty thousand, would be killed or arrested. An learned in a coded letter from his younger brother that Muoi Huong, his case officer, had been arrested and was being tortured. He also learned that he was being summoned home because the Vietminh—soon to be reborn as the Vietcong—were finally embarking on the armed struggle that would launch the Second Indochina War.

An vividly remembers standing on the Golden Gate Bridge in October, 1959, wondering what he should do next. In his pocket was an airplane ticket to Saigon. Rising below him in the harbor were the solitary tower and concrete walls of Alcatraz, the notorious island prison. He feared this was a sign of the fate that awaited him if he returned to Vietnam—years of prison and torture in the tiger cages of Vietnam's own Devil's Island. He had been offered a job teaching Vietnamese at the military language school in Monterey. He could travel to Cuba and try to get back to Vietnam through Russia. He could exile himself to France. Finally, An the loyal patriot, who had in his possession four suits that belonged to the Communist Party of Vietnam and should rightfully be returned to the people, boarded his plane and flew home to Saigon.

"I have two loves, like Josephine Baker," he says. "I love my country, and I love the United States. When the war was over, I wanted them to get back together."

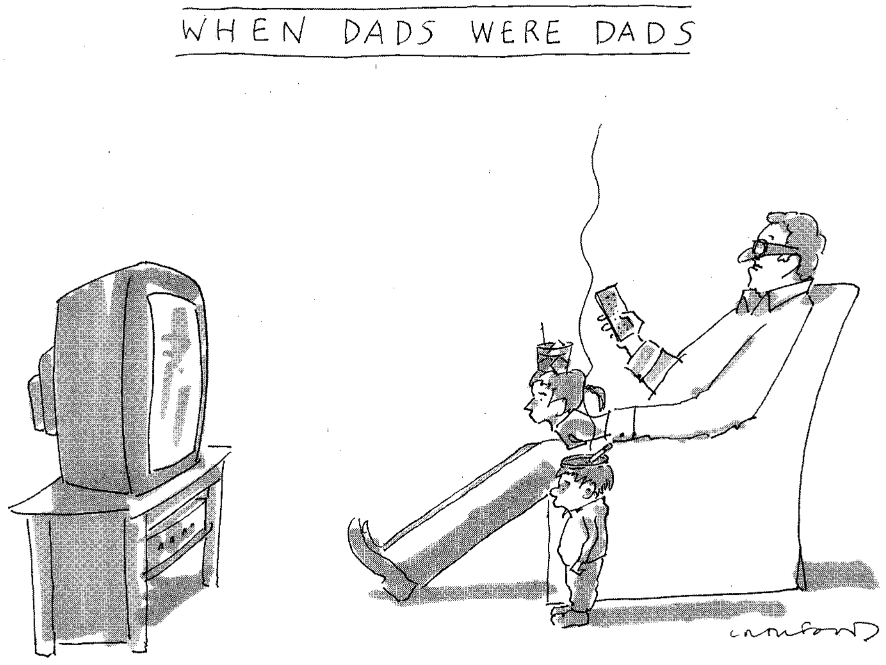
On returning to Saigon, An was so frightened that he hid in his house for a month. Then, in a bold stroke, he used family connections to call on Tran Kim Tuyen for help. A former military surgeon, Tuyen was the brilliant, diminutive figure who ran South Vietnam's intelligence network for President Ngo Dinh Diem and his younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. This vast C.I.A.-sponsored network of spies and clandestine military forces operated out of the President's cabinet under the anodyne name of the Office of Political, Cultural, and Social Research. If Tuyen hired him, An figured he would be safe, at least for the moment, from arrest.

Tuyen put An in charge of the foreign correspondents working for V.T.X., the Viet News Agency. Many of them, with no training in the profession, had never filed a story as a journalist. An ordered them to write a story a week. They complained to Tuyen, saying that doing journalism would get in the way of their work as spies—their real job. Supporting An, Tuyen instructed his foreign agents to get "serious in your work" and start filing stories like the "professional pressman" An.

Tuyen fell out of power, after a failed coup, and An moved from V.T.X. to Reuters and from there to *Time*. Recognized as one of the most hardworking journalists in town, always ready to help his colleagues with informed opinions or telling anecdotes, An gave information in order to get it. Describing to Ngoc Hai the similarities between journalists and spies, An said, "Their food is information, documents. Just like birds, one has to keep feeding them so they'll sing."

"From the Army, intelligence, secret police, I had all kinds of sources," An says. "The commanders of the military branches, officers of the Special Forces, the Navy, the Air Force—they all helped me." In exchange for this steady stream of information, An gave his South Vietnamese informants the same thing he gave his Communist employers. "We discussed these documents, as the South Vietnamese tried to figure out what they meant. They had a problem. How were they going to deal with the Americans?" An then turned around and advised the Americans on how to deal with the Vietnamese. It was a high-level confidence game, with death hovering over him should he be discovered photographing the strategic plans and intelligence reports slipped to him by his South Vietnamese and American sources.

An worked through the night photographing these documents. Then his film cannisters were disguised to look like *nem ninh hoa*, grilled pork wrapped in rice paper, or hidden in the bellies of fish that had begun to rot. More fish or *nem* would be piled into baskets made to look like offerings being presented at a Buddhist



funeral. In the morning, when An walked his German shepherd at the horse-racing track, he would deposit his *nem* cannisters in an empty bird's nest high in a tree. For larger shipments, he hid his rolls of film under the stele of what he pretended was a family grave. An's wife sometimes followed him at a distance. If he was arrested, she could alert his couriers.

Using live drops, dead drops, couriers, and radio transmitters that linked him through C.O.S.V.N. to military headquarters in North Vietnam, An was supported by dozens of military intelligence agents who had been detailed to work on his behalf. Of the forty-five couriers devoted to getting his messages out of Saigon, twenty-seven were captured and killed. "There were times before my departure on a mission when my wife and I agreed, if I were arrested, it would be best if I were killed," An told Ngoc Hai. "It would be more horrible if they tortured me for information that put other people's lives at risk. Sometimes it got so dangerous that, while my hands were steady, my legs were shaking uncontrollably. Despite my efforts to keep calm, the automatic reflexes of my body made me shiver with fear."

"An was of paramount importance to the Communists, not only for getting information to the North but also for corroborating what they were receiving from other sources," says former C.I.A. interrogator Frank Snepp. Author of "Decent Interval," about the chaotic collapse of Saigon in 1975, Snepp now works as a television-news producer in Los Angeles. "An had access to strategic intelligence. That's obvious," Snepp says. "But no one has 'walked the cat backward,' done a postmortem of the damage he did. The agency didn't have the stomach for it." Snepp suggests that one source for An's intelligence was Robert Shaplen, the *New Yorker* correspondent. Close friends and collaborators, An and Shaplen spent hours closeted in Shaplen's room on the third floor of the Continental Palace Hotel, occasionally stepping out on the balcony to avoid being overheard. "Shaplen was one of our favorite journalists," Snepp says. "We had orders from the top to give him unbelievable access to the embassy and high-level intelligence.

"We estimated there were fourteen thousand spies operating in South Vietnam. The Communists infiltrated right to the heart of the enemy. It was a government of Swiss cheese." Describing turning points in the war, such as Henry Kissinger's secret negotiations in Paris and the decision by the South Vietnamese government in 1975 to abandon its positions in the Central Highlands, Snepp says, "The Communists knew what was happening before the U.S. Embassy knew.

"We didn't understand the degree of corruption in the South Vietnamese government," Snepp goes on. "We didn't want to look at corruption or morale. We didn't want to know we were backing the wrong horse. This was true in Iran or Iraq or anywhere else where we've supported corrupt governments. An, of course, wanted very much to know these things. He knew under these conditions that Vietnamization would never work."

My daily conversations with An begin to fall into a pattern. I arrive at his gate in the morning and pull the bell. An shuffles down the driveway and shakes my hand with his bony fingers. We stroll through the garden, admiring his cocks and singing birds, greet the two little dogs he keeps tied near his front door, and then sit for hours in his *salle de séjour*. His voice is low, hardly a whisper over the sound of the traffic roaring outside his gate. As the hours advance, I move from the couch to sit in a chair next to him. Pretending to adjust the microphone at his throat, I lean my ear toward his lips. Like a Vietnamese Jean-Paul Sartre, who preferred to conduct his political battles over a cup of coffee at the Café de Flore, An rarely claims to have done anything more during the war than observe and analyze events. But we know of several occasions when he reached behind the curtain to adjust the scene. One was the battle of Ap Bac, in 1963, which marked a turning point in the expanding American war. For the first time, the Vietcong fought at battalion strength and won a decisive victory against Vietnamese troops supported by American helicopters, armored vehicles, and artillery. Two Vietcong soldiers received North Vietnam's highest military-exploit medal for winning this battle. One was the commander of the Communist forces. The other was Pham Xuan An, who devised the winning strategy.

An comes into focus again at the Tet Offensive, the simultaneous attack on more than a hundred South Vietnamese cities and other targets during the New Year's ceasefire of 1968. Planning for the offensive had begun two years earlier, when the head of An's intelligence network, a colonel known by his nom de guerre, Tu Cang, moved from the jungle into Saigon. Tu Cang was a famous cowboy, a hearty, affable man, who packed a pair of K-54 pistols and could plug a target at fifty metres with either his left or his right hand. A former honor student at the French lycée in Saigon, Tu Cang had lived underground in the Cu Chi tunnels for so many years that by the time he reëntered Saigon he had forgotten how to open a car door. An replaced Tu Cang's jungle sandals with new shoes and bought him a suit of clothes. Soon the two men were driving around town in An's little Renault 4CV like old friends.

Pretending to be chatting about dogs and cockfights, they were sighting targets for the Tet Offensive. Tu Cang proposed attacking the Treasury to get some money. An told him the Treasury was the wrong target—"They only hand out salaries there." An said a better target was the courthouse, where lots of gold was stored as evidence in the trials of South Vietnam's legion of burglars and smugglers. He advised Tu Cang to bring an acetylene torch.

Tu Cang isolated twenty targets in Saigon, including the Presidential Palace and the United States Embassy. He personally led the attack on the palace, where fifteen of the seventeen members in his team were killed outright. He himself barely escaped to a nearby safe house, and he hid with his two pistols held to his head, vowing to kill himself rather than be captured. The following day, he and An were driving around the city again, this time counting the bodies of the Vietcong soldiers who had died in the attack. (To commemorate the role these two men played in the battle, Tu Cang's pistols and Pham Xuan An's green Renault are on display in the museum of military intelligence at Army headquarters in Hanoi.)

Later that spring, in what was called the mini-Tet offensive, the Vietcong began shelling Saigon indiscriminately, blowing up buildings and killing scores of civilians. An sent a note into the field. "I told them to stop the shelling. It had no military objective and was alienating people."

"What happened next?" I ask.

"The shelling stopped."

In 1970, An's fellow *Time* correspondent Robert Sam Anson was captured by North Vietnamese soldiers and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, where at least twenty-five other journalists were already dead or unaccounted for. After Anson's wife pleaded with An to help her, he secretly arranged for Anson's release. It would be another seventeen years before Anson learned the story of what An had done for him. When Anson saw An again in 1987, he asked him, "Why did you save me, if you were an enemy of my country?" An replied, "Yes, I was an enemy of your country, but you were my friend." To this day, Anson works with a photo of An on his desk.

An won his final military-exploit medal for the role he played in the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, which ended with the Communists seizing Saigon on April 30, 1975. His last deed in the war was another act of friendship. Hours before the city fell, An arranged the escape of his old patron, the South Vietnamese spymaster Tran Kim Tuyen. In the famous photo showing the helicopter taking off from the roof of what is usually misidentified as the United States Embassy (it was actually a C.I.A. safe house two blocks away), the last person climbing the rickety ladder to get on board is Tran Kim Tuyen. Out of the frame, waving goodbye, stands Pham Xuan An.

When An's former colleagues first learned his story—from rumors that began circulating in the eighties—they invariably recalled a scene, a revelatory moment, which was suddenly explained by the news. Nick Turner, An's former boss at Reuters, confirmed his suspicions about An's unannounced absences from the office. H. D. S. Greenway, known to his friends as David, suddenly understood why his former colleague at *Time* knew more than he did about Lam Son 719, the disastrous attempt by the South Vietnamese Army to attack Laos in 1971.

"I had been up on the border near Khe Sanh, watching badly mauled soldiers retreating from Laos," Greenway told me. "I described them as survivors from the original column leading the attack. 'No,' An said, without the slightest hesitation. 'The original column was wiped out. What you saw was survivors from the attempt to rescue the column, which also failed.' Later, when I thought back on it, he seemed remarkably well informed. It's the kind of insight you'd have only from knowing what both sides in the battle were doing."

Nayan Chanda, who was working for Reuters and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, remembered seeing An standing in front of the Presidential Palace on the last day of the war, as Communist tank No. 843 smashed through the iron gate. "There was a strange, quizzical smile on his face. He seemed content and at peace with himself. I found it odd," Chanda says. "His wife and children had just been airlifted out of the country, and he didn't seem to have a care in the world." Chanda later realized that An was celebrating the Communist victory, for which he had worked for thirty years.

Aside from Chanda's fleeting glimpse, An kept his cover in place after 1975. "It was a dangerous moment for me," he says. "It would have been easy for someone to put a bullet through my skull. All I could do was wait for someone from the jungle to come out and recognize me."

An and his mother moved into the Continental Palace Hotel. They lived first in Robert Shaplen's old room. Then An moved into *Time's* two-room office. He was repeatedly summoned for interrogations by the police, until intelligence officials intervened. People began to suspect that he was "a man of the revolution" when they saw him ride his bicycle to the military supply depot and leave with bags of rice and meat tied to the handlebars. They assumed that he was an "April 30th revolutionary," someone who had jumped to the Communist side after the fall of Saigon.

Not even military officials as highly placed as Bui Tin knew An's story. Tin was the North Vietnamese colonel who accepted the surrender of the South Vietnamese government. He was working as the deputy editor of *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, the North Vietnamese Army newspaper, when he rode a tank up to the Presidential Palace on April 30th. Accidentally finding himself the highest-ranking officer there, Tin accepted the surrender of the South Vietnamese government and sat down at the President's desk to file a dispatch for his newspaper. Like most journalists newly arrived in Saigon, the next thing he did was go looking for Pham Xuan An. "On the morning of May 1st, I went to meet An at his office in the Continental Palace Hotel. I had no idea at the time that he was a spy," Tin says. "All he told me was that he was a correspondent working for Time-Life. He introduced me to all the journalists in town, and I helped them send their articles abroad. Three months after the end of the war, I still didn't know An was a spy."

Hints of the power struggle over An—pitting the military intelligence agents who wanted to send him to the United States against officials in the Politburo—were revealed to Bui Tin only when the government moved to get An's wife and children repatriated to Vietnam. Bucking the tide of refugees flooding out of the country, An's family spent a year trying to get back into Vietnam by means of a circuitous route that passed through Paris, Moscow, and Hanoi. The first official announcement of An's wartime allegiance came in December, 1976, when he flew to Hanoi as an Army delegate at the Fourth Party Congress. Friends who saw him walking around Hanoi in an Army uniform, which he was wearing for the first time in his life, were astounded by the transformation of the journalist into a beribboned hero.

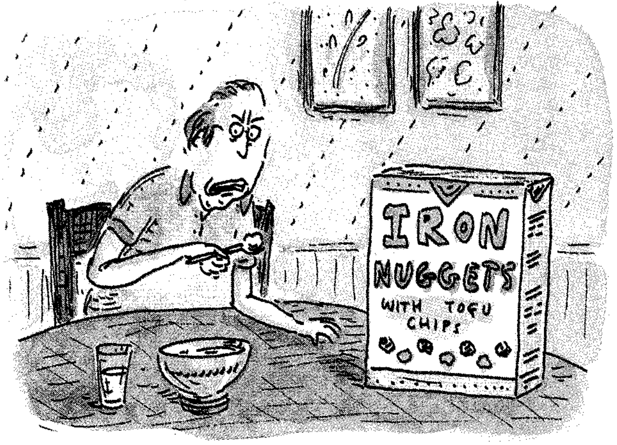
"After 1975, Saigon turned into Ho Chi Minhgrad," An says, speaking of the year that he spent manning *Time's* Saigon bureau, before it closed in May, 1976. "The censorship was so tight, it was like back in the days of Graham Greene. I didn't file many stories, because I didn't know how to dodge the censors. I spent my days going to cockfights and fish fights."

As hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese disappeared into prisons and labor camps, An was also forced into "reëducation." In August, 1978, he was sent to Hanoi for ten months' instruction at the Political Institute of the National Defense Department, a training camp in Marxist-Maoist thought for mid- and high-level cadres. "I had lived too long among the enemy," he says. "They sent me to be recycled."

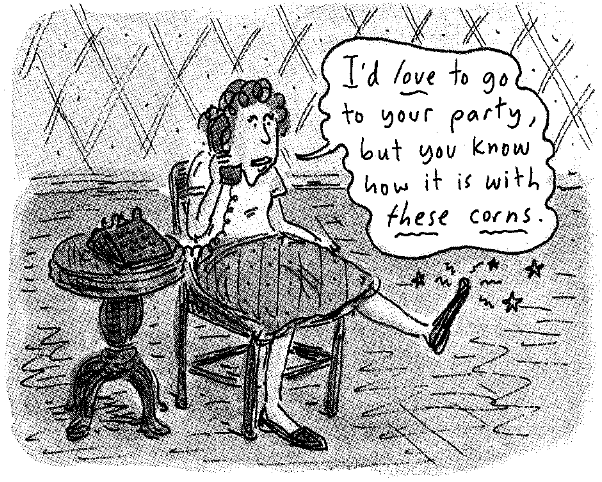
Always a bad student, An finished near the bottom of his class. "They didn't like my jokes," he says of the dour Northerners who were trying to teach him to speak "new" Vietnamese, full of politi-

How to Avoid SPRING FEVER

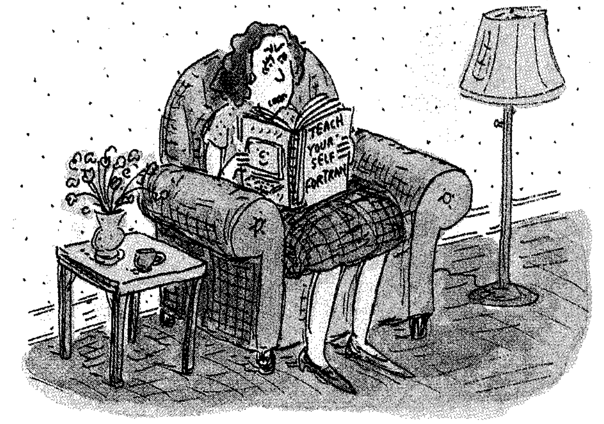
Eat only things you hate.


IRON NUGGETS
WITH TOFU CHIPS

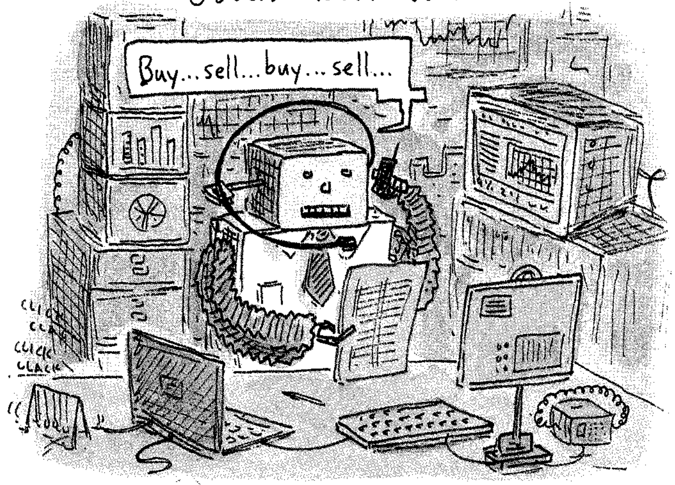
Develop some minor ailment.


I'd *love* to go to your party, but you know how it is with *these corns*.

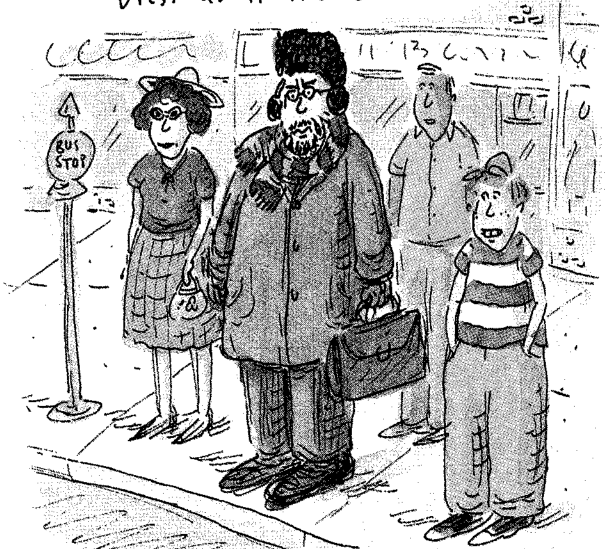
Read a long, boring book—preferably one that makes no sense to you at all.


TEACH YOURSELF FORTRAN

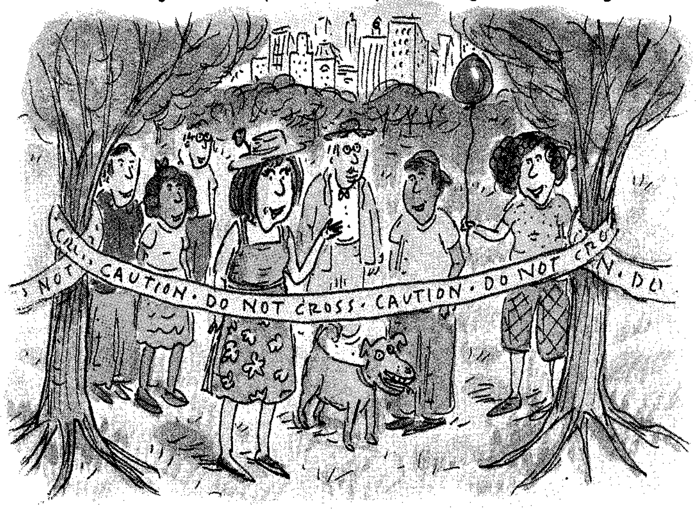
Obsess about work.


Buy... sell... buy... sell...
CLICK
CLACK
CLICK
CLACK

Dress as if it's still 15°.



If you *must* go outside, avoid strolling through the park, especially in May.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"I still say it's only a theory."

• •

cal terms borrowed from China. An suffered through the bone-chilling rains of a Hanoi winter, sleeping on a wooden bed with a cotton mattress. "I wore a Chinese cotton jacket that made me look like a mummy," he says. "I asked for a Russian jacket. But I was still cold, so I went back and asked for a 'hundred-and-eleven-degree jacket'—three girls, one sleeping on my right, one on my left, and one on top of me."

"They didn't like me at all," An says of his political reëducators. "But I haven't made a big enough mistake to be shot yet."

In 1990, Colonel An was elevated to the rank of general. At the time, Vietnam had begun to adopt *doi moi*, the "renovation policy" that opened the country to the West. Whether the Communists were recognizing An's merits, ashamed of the threadbare penury in which he lived, or maneuvering to keep him on a tighter leash is open to interpretation. An, as usual, explains his promotion with a joke. As Western journalists began returning to Vietnam, people would ask to see "General Givral." To avoid embarrassment, the government decided to raise his rank to match his title.

In 1997, the Vietnamese government denied An permission to visit the United States for a conference in New York to which he had been invited as a special guest, and it was not until March, 2002, that the seventy-four-year-old, emphysema-stricken general was allowed to retire. "They wanted to control me," he says. "That's why they kept me in the military so long. I talk very wildly. They wanted to keep my mouth shut." This is one possible explanation, but, as always with An, there could be another figure in the carpet. All we know is that, for at least twenty-seven years after the end of the war, An was still an active member of Vietnam's military intelligence service.

Some of An's former colleagues have accused him of being an "agent of influence" whose job was to manipulate the news and plant stories in *Time*. "We thought this was a joke," says David Greenway, who left *Time* in 1973 and eventually became the editorial-page editor of the Boston *Globe*. "The editors at *Time* weren't listening to us. None of *Time's* reporters was manipulating the news. He wouldn't have had any better luck than the rest of us."

Far from planting stories, says Richard Pyle, the former A. P. Saigon bureau chief, "An saved *Time* from embarrassing itself by publishing stories that weren't true. It was sleight of hand on his part. Without revealing how he knew what he knew, he'd let you know whether you were on the right track."

An was also accused, according to former *Time* correspondent Zalin Grant, of being "the first known case of a Communist agent to appear on the masthead of a major American publication as a correspondent." Murray Gart, the chief of correspondents at *Time* during the war, is reported to have said, after he learned the news, "An, that son of a bitch. I'd like to kill him."

Another reporter who is critical of An, though for different reasons, is Peter Arnett. An rented a house from Arnett's Vietnamese in-laws, and the two journalists would meet often at Givral's to swap stories. "It's still a raw point for me," Arnett says. "Even though I understand him as a Vietnamese patriot, I still feel journalistically betrayed. There were accusations all throughout the war that we had been infiltrated by the Communists. What he did allowed the right to come up and slug us in the eye. For a year or so, I took it personally. Then I decided it was his business."

With these few exceptions—and even Arnett ends our conversation by praising An as a "bold guy"—An's colleagues are united in their support of him. "Was I angry when I learned about An?" says Frank McCulloch, who was the head of *Time's* Asian bureaus when he hired An to work in the Saigon office for seventy-five dollars a week. "Absolutely not. It's his land, I thought. If the situation were reversed, I would have done the same thing."

"An was my colleague and star reporter," says McCulloch, who is now retired after a distinguished career as the managing editor of the Los Angeles *Times*, the Sacramento *Bee*, and other papers. "An had a very sophisticated understanding of Vietnamese politics, and he was remarkably accurate." McCulloch bursts into laughter. "Of course he was accurate, considering his sources!"

McCulloch remembers An with tremendous fondness and respect, and he says it was a "great pleasure," in 1990, to organize a subscription fund, which raised thirty-two thousand dollars, to send An's eldest son, Pham Xuan Hoang An, known to everyone as Young An, to journalism school at the University of North Carolina. The list of subscribers to the fund reads like a *Who's Who* of Vietnam War reporters. (Hoang An, who earned a law degree from Duke University in 2002, now works for Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.)

Mai Chi Tho, An's former boss, emerged after the war as one of Vietnam's most powerful figures, serving as regional Party committee head, governing South Vietnam, and as Minister of the Interior. At Tho's villa in central

Saigon—the former Swiss Embassy—I am ushered into a sumptuous reception room on the ground floor, which is filled with mahogany furniture and sculptures carved from rocks gathered at Vietnam's famous revolutionary sites. Dominating the far end of the room is an altar covered with flowers, bowls of fruit, and four hand-tinted photographs of Mai Chi Tho's parents and his two famous brothers: Dinh Duc Thien, the two-star general who helped build the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and Le Duc Tho, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who snookered Henry Kissinger at the Paris Peace Accords.

Mai Chi Tho is standing at the altar, holding a lighted bundle of incense in his hand and bowing in front of his father's picture. Today is his father's death day, not a time, customarily, for receiving strangers, but Tho knows that my stay in the country is short. He places the incense on the altar and comes to shake my hand. Dressed in gray slacks and a purple shirt, he is an imposing, white-haired man with a direct gaze. Bigger than most Vietnamese, Tho had to have an extra-large tunnel made for himself during the ten years that he spent living underground at Cu Chi.

Schooled in all the best prisons in Vietnam, including what was later known as the Hanoi Hilton, where John McCain spent five years, and Poulo Condore, the Devil's Island where, Tho says, two-thirds of his fellow-inmates died before he was released in 1945, General Tho is a war-hardened opponent, who today is an affable host offering his American visitor tea and fruit. "It was really hard work, but we had to do it," he says of his effort to raise the money that sent An to America in 1957. "The Party had very little money, but we thought the effort was worth it—An was the first person we sent to America—to learn the culture of the people who were taking over from the French to become our enemy.

"An was the perfect man for the job," he says. "It was a major coup for us."

I ask Tho about the other opportunity, which Vietnam did miss—the chance to send An to the United States again in 1975. He stares at me through his steel-frame spectacles. "I don't know how this story got out in the open," he says, obviously regretting that I know enough to ask this question. "He would have been great if we had sent him to the United States." This is the only hint of Tho's opinion in the matter, before he switches to the Party line that An had suffered enough from working for so many years behind enemy territory and that he should be allowed to retire in peace.

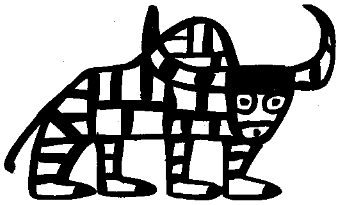
I know before I ask it that my next question will go unanswered. "What, exactly, did An do for you?"

Minister Tho smiles and offers me another cup of tea. "An had the best sources and access to secret information," he says. "He had his ear to the ground like no one else in Saigon. If you wanted to know what was happening, An was the man to ask. After the war, we made him a general and Hero of the People's Armed Forces. Without giving you any details, that alone should tell you the importance of what he did for his country."

I ring the bell for my final meeting with An. Last night, a typhoon blew in from the east, and showers have been falling off and on all morning. Now that the rains have come, An's room fills with the smell of damp dogs and bird droppings, and my ankles turn into a mess of red dots and begin to swell from flea bites. By mid-morning, the air thickens with the smell of frying peppers and vegetables and then dissipates as An continues to talk through the lunch hour and into the afternoon. Fortunately, I have learned to eat a substantial breakfast before going to see him.

Great streaming sheets of water are puddling in the garden and filling the air with mist. I worry about An's yellowing books, which are getting foxed with mold and slowly dissolving into unreadable pulp. An pauses occasionally to get up and reach for one of these books. He searches for a quote or presses a text into my hands to confirm his analysis. Many of An's books are signed, either by their authors or by the people who presented them to him. Of his two copies of Neil Sheehan's "A Bright Shining Lie," one is inscribed by Sheehan, the other by CBS correspondent Morley Safer.

In the afternoon, when the rains have blown off, An rises to shuffle through the kitchen and out the back door into the driveway. He opens his desk drawer to show me some old photos. He dismissively flings aside some newer pictures, showing him in his general's uniform standing next to members of the Vietnamese Politburo. "They wanted to see what I looked like," he says. "They spent the war in the jungle and had never met me."



I fish out of the drawer a medal attached to a red ribbon. "What's this?" I ask. "They just give me these things," he says. "I have no idea what they mean.

"I worked in obscurity. I die in obscurity," he says, shutting the drawer.

Walking back into the house, we again pause in front of An's library. "I'm going to miss these when I'm no longer around," he says. "I'm the only one who cares about these old stories."

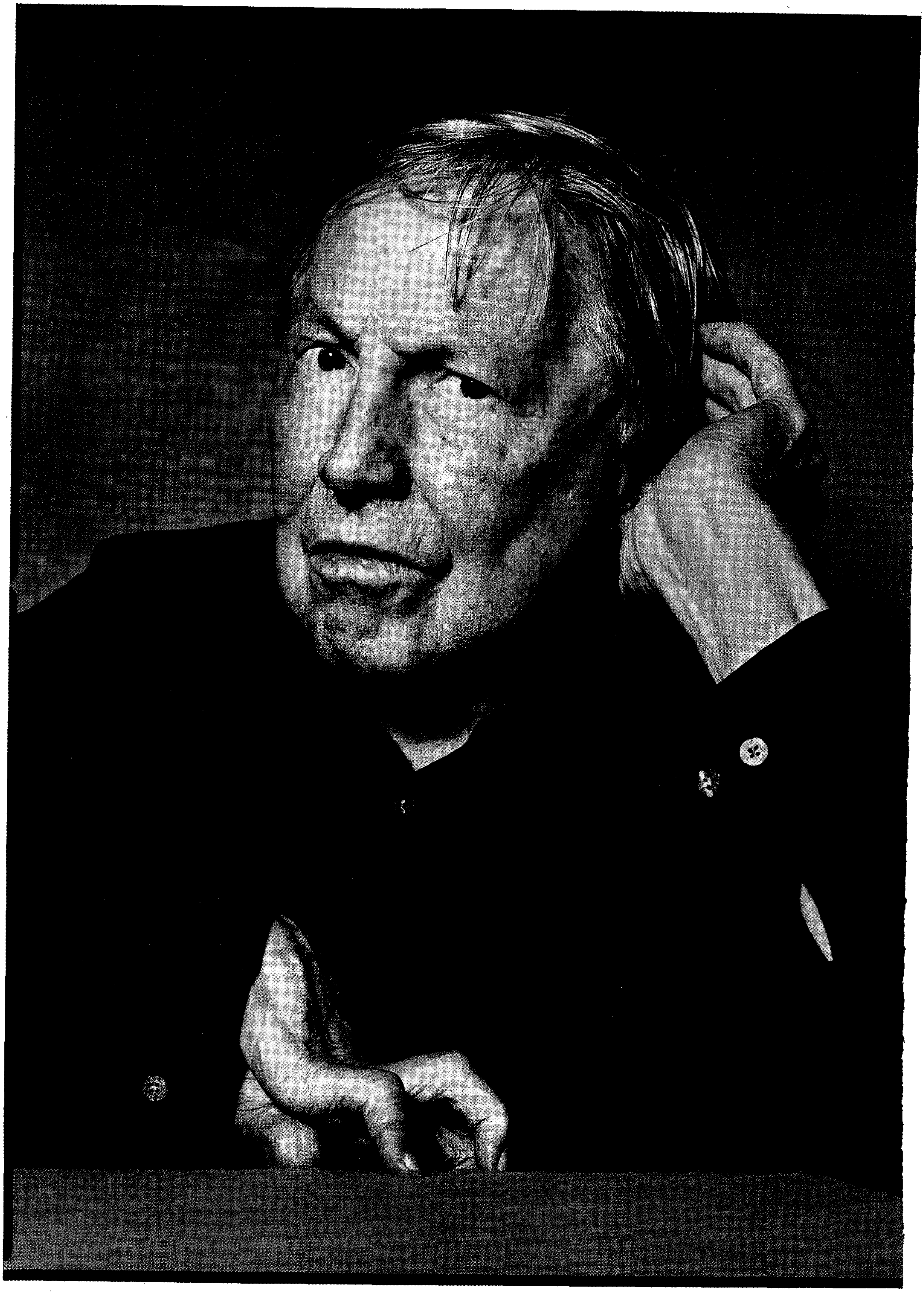
I remark that An's collection of books includes volumes in French and English but very few in Vietnamese. "People here can't write freely," he says. "This is one reason I won't write about my life. I'd get in trouble if I talked about my life or what I know."

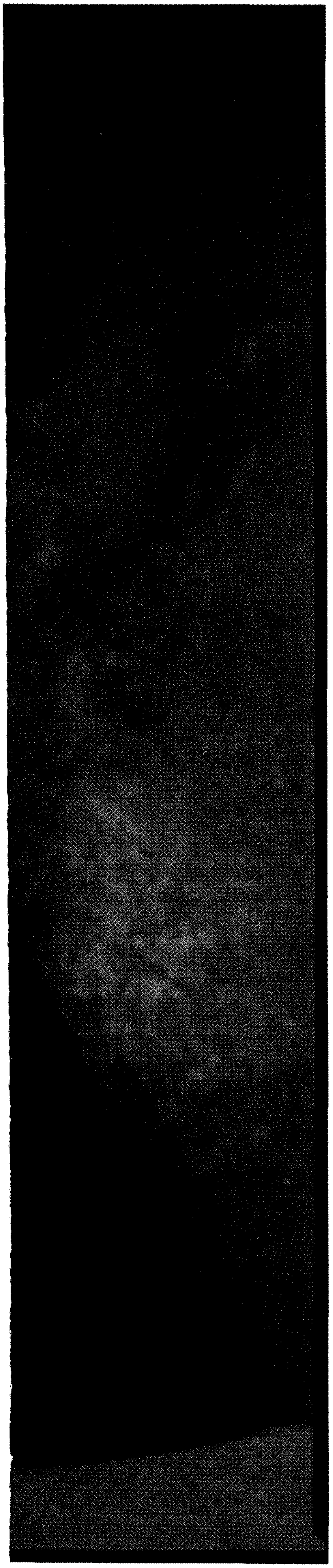
I sometimes feel as if the books An presses into my hands are coded messages, ways of talking about experiences that are still too dangerous to confront directly. For each day's visit, An seems to have chosen a text or a passage around which to weave our conversation. One day it is Dickens, writing, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Another day, the lesson is drawn from the "Fables" of Jean de La Fontaine. An delights in these stories of beasts acting like men, and men like beasts.

At our final meeting, An shows me a book by Gérard Tongas, a French educator who went to Hanoi to help the Communists establish a high school after their victory over the French in 1954. According to An, Tongas, like Edward Lansdale, had an intelligent dog that one day saved him from being poisoned to death.

I see from the inscription on the flyleaf that Tongas's book was given to An by the head of the Asia Foundation, the group that sponsored his travels in America. The title alone seems pregnant with meaning: "J'ai Vécu dans l'Enfer Communiste au Nord Viet Nam et J'ai Choisi la Liberté" ("I Have Lived in the Communist Hell of North Vietnam, and I Have Chosen Liberty").

"It's a very important book, a true book," An says. "You must read it before you write anything." ♦





PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING PENN

Rauschenberg in New York, 2005.

PROFILES

EVERYTHING IN SIGHT

Robert Rauschenberg's new life.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Captiva and Sanibel, two small barrier islands off Florida's southwest coast near Fort Myers, caught the full force of last summer's Hurricane Charley. The Category 4 storm caused an estimated fourteen billion dollars in property damage on the islands, snapping coconut palms in half, flinging boats around like clamshells, and turning uprooted Australian pines into airborne missiles. Robert Rauschenberg, a full-time resident of Captiva since 1970 and the largest private landholder on the island, resisted leaving until Charley had roared through; he was then evacuated by helicopter, because conditions on the island had become unsafe, and he couldn't get back to his studio for three weeks.

All his properties—he owns ten houses there, in addition to a stretch of carefully preserved palmetto jungle—took a beating. The house that came through with the least damage, luckily, was the studio, which he and his companion, Darryl Pottorf, designed and built in 1993. The studio, a white bunkerlike building that overlooks the Gulf of Mexico—Rauschenberg once described it as "a cross between the Taj Mahal and the Pentagon"—has storage and workshop space for his assistants on the ground level and, on the second floor, a forty-by-eighty-foot room with six huge worktables, where Rauschenberg lays out the images that will become his paintings. Bob (nobody calls him anything else) was sitting beside one of the tables when I visited him last December. He was in a high office chair on wheels, chatting with Pottorf and one of his studio assistants while he watched a cooking show on TV. He'd had a run of medical misfortunes—a broken hip with internal complications in 2001, and a year later a head injury and a stroke that paralyzed his right side—but, as long as he stayed in the chair, Rauschenberg, who is seventy-nine, seemed improbably youthful.

Eight paintings from his new "Scenarios" series were hanging on the studio walls—large pictures, seven feet high by ten feet wide, with colorful images of exceptional clarity and crispness, and with more white space than you usually find in Rauschenberg's work. For several months after his stroke, he had been depressed and unable to work, but gradually the habits of a lifetime reasserted themselves, and a little more than a year ago he started the new series. I had seen a few of them the week before, at his studio in New York; they struck me as the strongest, most lyrical pictures he had produced in a long time.

The biggest change in the new paintings was that he had not taken the photographs reproduced in them. "I can't do that now, because of my arm," he said. His paralyzed right hand lay in his lap, cocked at a right angle to his wrist, the long, tapering fingers bent backward. "I get other people to take them for me." His tone was matter-of-fact.

I asked whether he directs the photographers. "Now and then," he replied. "I tell them, 'Don't do any selecting. And if you think something would be a bad shot, take it.' " (Wide smile and a short, high-pitched burst of laughter, from a man who appreciates his own humor.) Rauschenberg has been using photographic images as art material since the nineteen-fifties, and the current flood of photo-based art throughout the world is traceable in some part to his influence. Being unable to take his own photographs hurts, but not to the point of self-pity: "I can't stand myself or anyone else if they start whining. I just have to figure out ways to continue without getting so distraught I can't function."

The day nurse who looks after him came from the kitchen to see if he needed anything, and he indicated that he'd like his glass refilled—white wine and soda, which he likes in a big glass, "with too much ice." Czar, a docile white Samoyed, ambled over and flopped down by Rauschenberg's chair. I was thinking of a time twenty years ago, sitting with the artist, with three big dogs at our feet and a soap opera playing soundlessly on a TV. I'd always assumed that TV was something he watched without really watching, a flow of images that might feed into the endlessly replenished visual storehouse he draws upon for his work. That morning, though, looking at a man and a tearful young woman on the screen, he nodded sagely and said, "He's married to her, but he doesn't know it yet, because he has amnesia." It reminded me of something he'd told the critic Dore Ashton several years earlier: "I have a peculiar kind of focus. I tend to see everything in sight."

While he went to the bathroom, using a wheeled walker and attended by the nurse, I took a closer look at the paintings. Many of the images had the Rauschenbergian look of something ordinary seen in a new way—a multicolored umbrella, a bicycle, urban detritus, street signs or crudely lettered advertisements ("Pappy's Parking"), discarded tires, run-down houses, trucks and cars and people walking—but instead of brushing against each other or overlapping, most of the images existed in a separate, clearly defined space. In one painting, a photograph filled the upper right quadrant; it showed a group of young men and women in bathing suits, lying or standing on large rocks near water, in front of a concrete wall on which someone had painted the word "REMOVE" in big orange letters. The bathers coexisted with other images—a rusted manhole cover, an industrial pipe with gauges and dials attached, the rainbow-hued beach umbrella—working against each other with such exuberant energy that you feel the jolt. As nearly every critic has observed, Rauschenberg is the artist who reinvented collage by inviting the whole world into it. In the matter of influence, he is ranked with Duchamp and Pollock. The open-ended attitude toward collage materials, photographs, reproductions of other art, performance activities, and various aspects of popular culture has been so thoroughly assimilated by younger artists, such as Kiki Smith and Julian Schnabel, that some of them might not even realize they're quoting Rauschenberg.

A number of new exhibitions are in the works. The "Scenarios" (which made their début at the PaceWildenstein Gallery, in New York, a few weeks after my visit) were shown at the Miami Art Museum in March, and a clutch of exhibitions will take Rauschenberg to Los Angeles, Valencia, Nice, and, in January, 2007, Houston, where the Menil Collection is preparing a show of his 1971 "Cardboards"—pictures made from used and flattened cardboard boxes. By far the most significant event, however, will be an exhibition of his "combines": the prodigiously influential works, done between 1954 and 1964, that include elements of both painting and sculpture—along with such three-dimensional shockers as stuffed chickens, a painted-on quilt from his bed, and, in the infamous "Monogram," an angora goat with a tire encircling its middle. The combine exhibition opens on December 20th at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and then travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Pompidou Center, in Paris, and the Moderna Museet, in Stockholm. Paul Schimmel, MOCA's chief curator, who organized the show, has identified a hundred and sixty-two works as combines or combine-paintings, and he plans to put seventy of them on view. "Rauschenberg's legacy begins with the combines," he told me. "Artists who change the way other artists look at art—that happens very infrequently. Pop art, Fluxus, Arte Povera, the performance art of the sixties, conceptualism in the seventies, environmental art, installation art, political art—

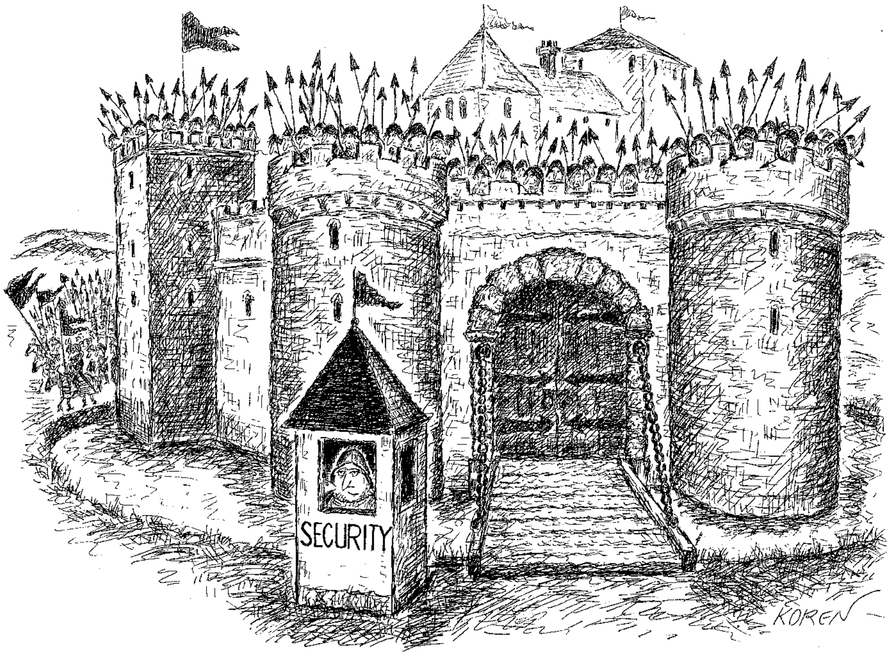
all that erasure between the art object and the person who made it began with the combines."

It takes Rauschenberg a week or more to complete one of his "Scenarios," a lot longer than it used to when he had the use of both hands and did most of the manual work himself. He signs each painting with his left hand, in laborious and somewhat wavering capital letters. The process, as Darryl Pottorf explained it to me, requires a lot of complex and expensive equipment and many helpers. (Pottorf, who is fifty-three and an artist himself, stopped helping in the studio after Rauschenberg had his stroke; mindful of the rumors about studio assistants in Willem de Kooning's last years, he doesn't want anyone suggesting that he does the paintings.) The photographic images are scanned into a computer and adjusted for size and color; they are then fed into a specially designed digital printer, which uses water-based pigment dyes to reproduce them on acetate sheets. Rauschenberg then has his studio assistants move the images around until he gets what he wants, and the assistants, using only water and squeegees, transfer the result to the paper, which has been laminated under pressure to an aluminum backing. The paper has a matte finish and looks like canvas. It gets three coats of the same ultraviolet-deflecting solution used to protect outdoor display ads, which is supposed to last for two hundred years. Counting the eight "Scenarios" in the studio, he had finished twenty-seven of them so far. "I'll do them until I get good at it," Rauschenberg told me, "and then I'll stop."

He was back in his chair, sipping from a fresh glass of iced white wine. Rauschenberg used to go through about a bottle and a half of Jack Daniel's a day, and I wondered how anyone could drink so steadily and still function, let alone keep working at his level of energy and inventiveness. A few years ago, when his health broke down, he spent a month at the Betty Ford Center, in Rancho Mirage, California. He didn't drink for a couple of months after leaving the center, and he still hasn't gone back to whiskey, but he takes in more than a bottle of white wine a day, and when he goes out to dinner he sometimes allows himself a vodka-and-soda, or maybe two. "One of the things they teach you at Betty Ford's," he said, "is 'Don't ever be without something to drink.' I still don't enjoy wine, but it's the easiest thing." Didn't "something to drink" mean something nonalcoholic? I asked. "That's what *she* means!" he said, with his cackling laugh.

He was feeling good about the "Scenarios." "Each one of them is a puzzle to put together," he said. "One of the reasons these paintings are tighter is that I don't have the freedom that I had, like being able to slop around with paint. They've simplified themselves. The focus is more exact. I know when these are finished, more quickly than I did when they were looser." When I asked him about the title, he said, "I don't know. Sort of a fulfillment, I guess. But it could also be that it's just a nice word."

In the past, he would have talked more and revealed more, said things about the work that surprised me and probably surprised himself, too, but now he was getting tired. I got up to go. He agreed that he was in the midst of a new career phase. "I hate to say it," he announced, "but I think I'm playing a cripple."



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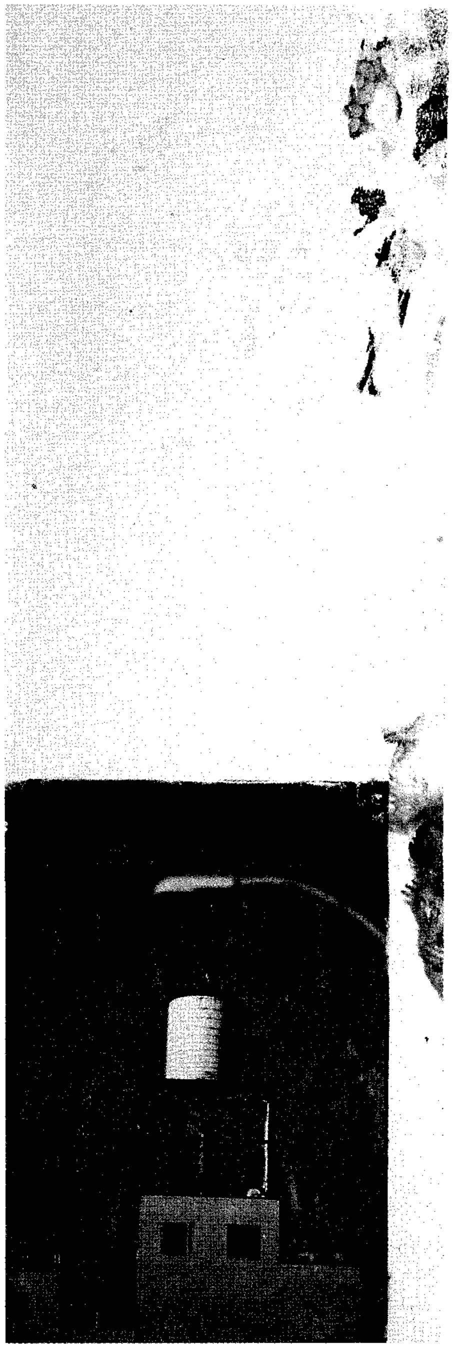
In 1961, when I first met Rauschenberg, he was just beginning to outdistance his reputation as the bad boy of contemporary art. His early work—the all-white and the all-black paintings, the paintings made out of dirt and growing grass, and, above all, the combines—had certainly attracted attention, but not the sort that offered much encouragement. "Till Eulenspiegel is abroad again, and one must be patient," the art historian Leo Steinberg wrote in *Arts*, about Rauschenberg's 1955 contribution to a group show at the Stable Gallery. (He later published a letter of recantation, saying he had changed his mind about the artist.) Rauschenberg was my entry into contemporary art—I didn't get it before, and then I did, or thought I did. I loved the high-energy irreverence, the juxtaposition of art and popular culture, the unresolved tensions between beauty and ugliness.

Rauschenberg knew Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, and other leaders of the previous generation, whose achievement he revered and whose methods (agitated brushwork, dripped paint) he used in his own work. But he and Jasper Johns, who was a few years younger, had broken away from Abstract Expressionism, which completely dominated the teaching and practice of American art at that time. With crucial encouragement from the avant-garde composer John Cage, who had responded enthusiastically to his work when they were both at Black Mountain College, in the early fifties, Rauschenberg was looking out at the world around him—at its random collisions and associations—rather than focussing on his own emotional reactions. Rauschenberg's inclusiveness and Johns's more cerebral exploration of numbers, the alphabet, the American flag, and other images that "the mind already knows" opened the doors to Pop art, minimalism, and a dozen later developments in the early nineteen-sixties, which provided more innovation and excitement in the visual arts than any decade since the nineteen-twenties.

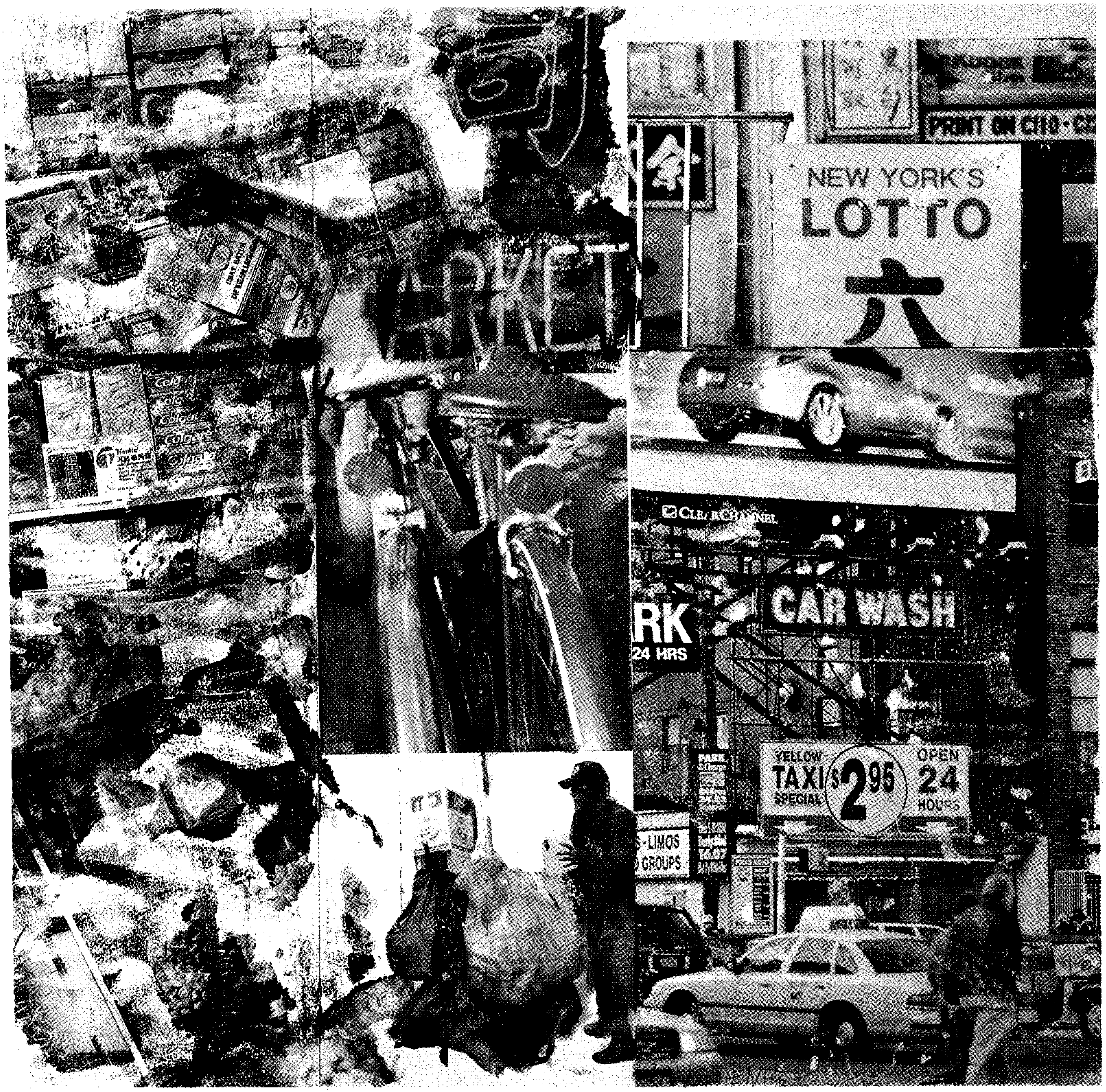
By the time I got around to writing about him, in 1964, a pair of Rauschenberg retrospectives—at the Whitechapel Gallery, in London, and the Jewish Museum in New York—had made critics and collectors take him more seriously. He lived and worked then in a loft building on lower Broadway. You weren't allowed to live in commercial lofts at that time, but if a building inspector had ever come around he couldn't have said much about the battered refrigerator and the mattress in one corner that constituted the domestic arrangements. There were always distractions. Rauschenberg was the stage manager for Merce Cunningham and his dance company, and he spent much of his time working on the sets, costumes, and lighting for their performances in New York and on tour. Steve Paxton, a dancer with the company, was staying in the loft, and he and several other dancers used to practice there. A pair of kinkajous slept during the day in a cage underneath the two big, grimy front windows, which let in the white light of downtown Manhattan; one of them bit the dancer Viola Farber, who wouldn't see a doctor because she was afraid Bob would get into trouble for having illegal pets. The telephone rang constantly, artists and other visitors came and went, and Rauschenberg, who had recently started a new series of silk-screen paintings, worked intermittently on four of them at the same time. It dawned on me at some point that, for him, this cheerful chaos provided ideal working conditions. He admired and envied the situation of the Cunningham dancers, he said, because for them there was never a definitive way of doing things. Rauschenberg wanted to be unfamiliar with what he was doing, to keep things open until the last moment and not to work "schemingly." He liked to think that he was collaborating with his materials, rather than trying to make them work for him, and he wanted as much as possible to keep his own feelings and tastes out of it. "I don't want a painting to be just an expression of my personality," he said. "I feel it ought to be much better than that."

Andy Warhol, who worshipped Rauschenberg and Johns as art-world stars, once asked their mutual friend the filmmaker Emile De Antonio why they didn't like him. "You're too swish," De Antonio said. This was before gay pride emerged; Bob and Jasper didn't hide their sexual preferences, but they didn't broadcast the information, either. Warhol started working with silk screens a few months before Rauschenberg, however, and Rauschenberg discovered the commercial silk-screen process on a visit to Warhol's studio. He promptly adopted it for his own uses. He clipped images from newspapers and magazines and sent them out to a jobber to be enlarged and reproduced on the screens; the images were transferred to canvas with printer's inks forced through the back of the silk with a squeegee. The silk-screen paintings he was doing when I arrived were his first in color—until then he had used only black-and-white—and the colors of the inks, unmodulated and garish, were satisfyingly unfamiliar. "I know how to describe this kind of color—delicious," he said at one point. "It's so glamorous. Every color is trying to be a star. At least, it doesn't look like the work of any other painter." The images he'd chosen were a lot like the images he would be using forty years later—Manhattan street signs, buildings, water towers, birds in flight, helicopters, clocks and dials, the Sistine ceiling, Rubens's "Toilet of Venus," a glass of water, a crate of Sunkist oranges. Sometimes they overlapped or crowded each other out, and sometimes he blurred them with solvent or heightened the effect with passages of acrylic paint, which he applied with rags or brushes or his fingers. "It's as much like Christmas to me as using objects I pick up on the street," he observed. "There's that same quality of surprise and freshness. . . . Some images absolutely insist on being themselves no matter what you do with them. Look at this baby." He held up to the light a screen showing the head of a bald eagle in closeup. "How's that for authority?"



"Random Want" (2003), one of Rauschen

When I'd been coming around for a couple of weeks, and this set of paintings was nearing completion, Rauschenberg decided that I, being a writer, should help him title them. I took this very seriously, and produced a list of titles, not one of which came close to making the cut. Rauschenberg, who had suffered a lot of humiliation from dyslexia as a child, and who still finds it difficult to read a book, has a poet's sense of words and the affinities between words and images. "Archive," "Windward," "Shaftway," "Overdrive," "Die Hard," and several other paintings from this series were



arios.” The large (approximately seven by ten feet) pictures are the strongest and most lyrical he has produced in many years.

shown at the Castelli Gallery in the fall, in his first really successful exhibition there.

The silk-screen paintings figured prominently eight months later, when he won the international prize for painting at the 1964 Venice Biennale. No American artist had ever won it before, and the judges' decision, denounced by Old Guardians but fervently acclaimed by younger European artists at the Biennale, brought him worldwide fame and celebrity. The day after the ceremony, Rauschenberg put in a call from Venice to New York. He told Tony Holder, a dancer who worked part time as his studio assistant, to go to the Broadway studio, collect all the old silk screens, and burn them. It was a form of insurance against the pressure to repeat himself.

At the recently reopened Museum of Modern Art on Fifty-third Street, a large fourth-floor gallery is devoted mainly to the work of Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Until quite recently, MOMA and Rauschenberg never quite hit it off. Alfred Barr, the museum's founding director and presiding genius, came to the opening of Johns's first one-man show, at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958, stayed for three hours, and selected three pictures for acquisition. When Rauschenberg had his first show at Castelli, two months later, the only work sold was “Bed,” the combine with the painted-on quilt, and Castelli was the buyer. Castelli once told me that in 1959, soon after he exhibited Rauschenberg's “Monogram” (the combine with the goat and the tire), the taxi magnate and avid collector Robert Scull had offered to buy and donate it to the Museum of Modern Art—he said he couldn't keep it at home, because his two sons would climb on the goat—and that Barr, after asking Castelli some uneasy questions, such as whether the piece might harbor vermin, had declined the gift. (Stockholm's Moderna Museet acquired "Monogram" a few years later.) At the opening of Rauschenberg's Jewish Museum retrospective in 1963, Barr asked Jasper Johns for help. He said he knew Rauschenberg's work was important, but he just couldn't respond to it. Which of the works here would Johns advise the museum to buy? Johns said they should buy the 1955 combine-painting called "Rebus," a key work whose found images (election poster, running athletes, comic strips, Botticelli's "Birth of Venus," a child's drawing of a woman) shared the space with passages of paint and collage elements. Barr didn't buy "Rebus," but a year later he got Philip Johnson to buy "First Landing Jump," a 1961 combine with an automobile tire, a working light bulb, and other uningratiating items, as a promised gift to the museum.

There are some important Rauschenbergs on view at MOMA. They include "First Landing Jump"; "Bed," which Leo Castelli gave in 1989, in honor of Alfred Barr; "Factum II," a 1957 combine-painting acquired in 1999 (it currently hangs alongside its twin, "Factum I," on loan from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles); and "Mint," a 1974 transfer painting on unstretched silk, from the artist's "Hoarfrost" series. Not a bad showing, but there are no silk-screen paintings, and no examples of his work after 1974, and the ensemble on view is somewhat less compelling than the Johns installation in the same room.

MOMA was not alone in its unresponsiveness to Rauschenberg's work—especially his later work. It used to be said that Picasso had done nothing interesting after 1935, and the critical rap on Rauschenberg is that he stopped breaking new ground around 1965. Part of the problem is that art just keeps pouring out of him, more than six thousand individual works so far, not counting prints and multiples. The Abstract Expressionists used to dismiss Rauschenberg as somebody who wasn't out to create a masterpiece every time. "What's the matter with him?" the painter Barnett Newman is reported to have said. "Does he think it's easy?" Creating masterpieces—precious objects for the discerning few—has never been his goal, although art historians now assign perhaps a dozen Rauschenbergs, including "Bed" and "Rebus," to that rarefied category. "I do what I do because . . . painting is the best way I've found to get along with myself," he said, back in the sixties. "And it's always the moment of doing it that counts. When a painting is finished it's already something I've done, no longer something I'm doing."

Since 1965, a lot of his work has been linked to social or communal causes—the environment, opposition to the war in Vietnam, artists' rights, international understanding. This makes collectors nervous. "We like our artists to be working out of private imperatives," John Elderfield, MOMA's chief curator, told me the other day. "St. Jerome is the model: the hermit in the cave with the pig, or the hermit of Sharon"—an allusion to Jasper Johns, who now lives in Sharon, Connecticut, and is renowned for producing very few paintings. "I think something else that's hurt Bob is the sense that minimalism has been the defining aspect of the art of the last thirty years. It's been thought of as the American art, which makes a more messily autobiographical art seem to be less central." Minimal art was profoundly influenced by Rauschenberg, who did his all-white and all-black paintings a decade before the movement was born. His work has always fluctuated between what the critic Barbara Rose once described as "a minimal austerity and . . . an elaborated, celebratory, florid excess," but it has never stayed in one place long enough for him (or anyone else) to feel comfortable about it.

Elderfield agrees that the Museum of Modern Art needs to upgrade its

INVISIBLE STRINGS

I remember my mother toward the end,

folding the tablecloth after dinner
so carefully,
as if it were the flag
of a country that no longer existed
but once had ruled the world.

•

Almost 8 A.M., curtain drawn shut, lying in bed, naked:

it's not the same as sex,
but close,
as a door slams,
a shoe crunches on gravel,
walking away.
Then the long afterward of lying still—
happy, lonely,
who can say which—
the world
just as it is, and the lover, too,
just so.

•

This spring night,

everyone at the party
younger than me
except for one man.

We give each other the secret password.

•

On this cloudy May day,

I keep thinking
maybe June is what I need
to make me happy.

•

Tears? Of course, but also the marsh grass

near the Mississippi:
your whispers and mine,
and the dog's long contented sighs.

•

Helicopter flies overhead

reminding me of that old war
where one friend lost his life,
one his mind,
and one came back happy
to be missing only an unnecessary finger.

•

Almost sixty:

from now on
even begonias are amazing.

—*Jim Moore*

Rauschenberg holdings. Just last week, news leaked out that it was trying to acquire "Rebus," the combine-painting that Johns advised Barr to buy in 1963; the purchase price is said to be as much as thirty million dollars. MOMA would also love to get a major silk-screen painting, and it has long coveted "Canyon," the great 1959 combine incorporating a real (stuffed) bald eagle with outstretched wings, which is owned by Ileana Sonnabend. "I can't think of an image that has more power than 'Canyon,'" Jeff Koons, an artist who freely acknowledges his debt to Rauschenberg, said recently. (He also said, "The chaos in my work—the acceptance of chaos—couldn't exist without Bob.") "Canyon" cannot legally be sold outside the United States, because of government regulations against traffic in endangered species, but it could be donated to a museum. Sonnabend, who used to be married to Leo Castelli, and who still presides, in her nineties, over the New York gallery that bears her name, is characteristically sibylline about her plans for this work. When I asked her about it a few years ago, she said, smiling slightly, "I might take it with me."

The hermit of Sharon was in his other house, on the Caribbean island of St. Martin, when I reached him by telephone last December. These days, Johns is much less isolated than his reputation suggests, and less reticent than Rauschenberg on the subject of their former relationship. We talked about the nineteen-fifties, when they both were finding their way out of Abstract Expressionism and experimenting with new forms and attitudes. They lived in the same loft building on Pearl Street then, saw each other's work every day, and gave one another the kind of encouragement that was hard to come by elsewhere. I knew that in 1954 Johns had destroyed all the work he'd made up to that time. Did this, I asked him, have something to do with Rauschenberg's influence?

"It had to do with a change of mind about what art meant—what it meant to be an artist," Johns replied. "When I met Bob, I wanted to be an artist but I wasn't an artist. Bob was an artist. He was the first real artist that I had any contact with. He'd had shows in Europe, and he'd shown in important New York galleries like Betty Parsons and the Stable, and he was very knowledgeable about the New York art scene. He knew most of the people in it. I believed that what Bob was doing was of extreme importance—and of course he believed it! That may have helped to convince me."

I reminded Johns of something he had said years ago: that Rauschenberg had "invented more than any artist since Picasso." "I think when I said that," he mused, "I was referring to his complex sense of structure, and . . . his constant reinvestigation of possibilities. You know, he was working then with paint, canvas, and real objects—such things as light bulbs and three-dimensional structures. It was a fantastically prolific conception of what art was. We were very close and considerate of one another, and for a number of years we were each other's main audience. I was allowed to question what he did, and he could question what I did. He once brought me the equivalent of a mimeographed map of the United States, simply gave it to me, and I took it as something to work with." (Johns painted three huge maps of the United States in the nineteen-sixties; they are among the most celebrated paintings of that era.)

The exchange of ideas between Rauschenberg and Johns in those years has been likened to the interaction between Picasso and Braque from 1908 to 1912, when they were jointly inventing Cubism. Johns gave Rauschenberg the title for "Erased de Kooning Drawing," which came into being in 1953, when Rauschenberg persuaded de Kooning to give him a drawing which he would then erase, to see whether a work of art could be created by the technique of erasure; Johns also did the precise lettering for the title, on the framed matte below the very faint, wraithlike ghost of the erased

"Neanderthals have moved in next door!"

• •

image. (This famous icon of conceptual art was offered to the Museum of Modern Art a few years ago, as part of a package of Rauschenbergs put together by his current dealer, the PaceWildenstein Gallery's Arne Glimcher; the museum turned it down, and the package, which included some very important early works, went to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.) Johns recently told Joachim Pissarro, a curator at MOMA, that he thought the term "combine" had been his suggestion. Pissarro asked him what he thought it meant, and Johns said, "It's painting playing the game of sculpture."

Rauschenberg doesn't recall that the word "combine" came from Johns. When I asked him about it, he said it was related in his mind to the term "mobile," which Marcel Duchamp had coined, in 1931, for Alexander Calder's moving sculptures, and also to farm machinery, but he agreed that in the fifties he and Johns had often traded ideas. What, I asked him, was the most important thing he got from Johns in those days? He thought for a moment, and said, "Courage. Persisting upstream." Neither one of them likes the Picasso-Braque comparison, because they feel that the work they were doing was never a joint or related effort. "Our work was very different because we're such different personalities," Johns said. "He had a different kind of imagination from mine. I remember once, I was reading Gertrude Stein's 'Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas' to him, reading it out loud in the studio, and Bob turned and said, 'One day they'll be writing about us like that.' This kind of thought had never entered my mind."

"Jasper was always an intellectual," Rauschenberg once told me. "He read a lot, he wrote poetry—he would read Hart Crane's poems to me, which I loved but didn't have the patience to read myself—and he was very critical of things like my grammar. But you don't let a thing like that bother you if you have only two or three real friends."

The Guggenheim's gigantic Rauschenberg retrospective in 1997 filled the entire museum on upper Fifth Avenue and spilled over in two additional exhibitions downtown. Nearly everybody agreed that it was too big, but how could it have been anything else from an artist who defined his themes as "multiplicity, variation, and inclusion"? The reviews were overwhelmingly positive. "This . . . is the artist of American democracy," wrote *Time's* art critic, Robert Hughes, "yearningly faithful to its clamor, its contradictions, its hope and its enormous demotic freedom, all of which find shape in his work." At the opening, Arne Glimcher saw the mid-career artist Kiki Smith looking a little distraught. Smith, a highly innovative worker in many different media, said, "Everything I've ever dreamed of doing, he did before I was born."

The exhibition did a lot to revive Rauschenberg's flagging reputation—and his prices—something that doesn't always happen with retrospectives. It also mobilized some of my own contradictory feelings about the artist, whose work I've followed for more than four decades with a mixture of fascination and occasional dismay. Anyone who produces as much as he does, and continues to experiment rather than play it safe, can't avoid bad work, and Rauschenberg has contributed his share of that. For a while after he moved to Captiva, in 1970, I missed the rough, street-scavenger look of his New York combines and paintings. I fell hard for the fragile, unapologetic beauty of his "Hoarfrost" series (1974-76), whose photographic images were imprinted on unstretched fabric, but some of the later metal-and-wood constructions ("Spreads" and "Scales") that he turned out with the help of carpenters and other assistants struck me as too slick and well made—not random enough to be Rauschenbergs. And then, a decade later, came ROCI—the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange—which took over his life from 1984 to 1991, and did little to enhance his reputation. ROCI was the artist's quixotic bid to further international understanding through art. He went to ten countries—Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba, China, Japan, Tibet, Malaysia, Chile, the German Democratic Republic, and the Soviet Union—and worked with local artists and artisans in each one to produce a body of large-scale paintings and sculptures, which were then exhibited in the host country. He was sure some corporation would sponsor this dreamy concept, but none did, and he ended up spending eleven million dollars to finance it himself. This required selling much of his art collection, including an early Johns painting, Warhol's "Popeye," and many key Rauschenbergs, and when that wasn't enough he mortgaged his Captiva houses. ROCI took him out of the art world, and earned some of the worst reviews he'd ever had—"at once altruistic and self-aggrandizing, modest and overbearing," the *Times* critic Roberta Smith wrote of the venture. When I asked Rauschenberg about the project recently, in Captiva, he said it had done what he wanted it to do—"except that I don't see any excess of world peace"—and that, in any case, he wasn't interested in regretting things. "If it's a successful mistake," he said, "then you applaud."

Someday, a museum will put together a focussed, highly selective exhibition of Rauschenberg's work since 1971. In every series, there are usually two or three paintings or sculptures, or both, where his unique gifts conspire to produce something original, surprising, and mysteriously engrossing—for instance, the 1981 sculpture called "The Ancient Incident (Kabal American Zephyr)" that was in his Captiva studio when I visited in December. It is a pyramid made from a matched pair of rough wooden stepladders, back to back, with two wooden chairs balanced on top of them, face to face, so that their front edges touch. Leo Steinberg, who has written penetratingly about Rauschenberg since his first brief review in *Arts*, had this piece reproduced on the jacket of a published lecture he delivered at the Guggenheim in 1997, called "Encounters with Rauschenberg." "It's the sort of image that stays with you," he said the other day. "It simply takes on a kind of permanence, and I can't imagine the world without it."

Twelve "Scenarios" were shown at the PaceWildenstein Gallery in January and February. Aside from a glib put-down in the New York *Sun*—the critic called the works "cool, bleak, faceless, and mildly professional"—there were few reviews; Rauschenberg's long career seems to have made criticism irrelevant. Arne Glimcher reports that the show sold out.

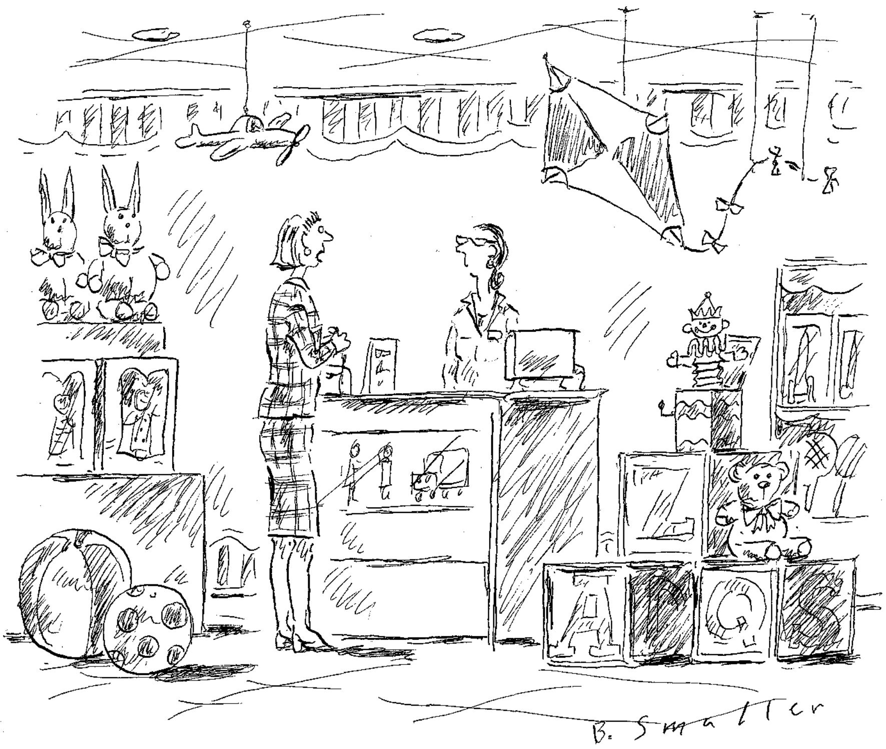
Rauschenberg takes more than a passing interest in upcoming exhibitions of his work. "I'm wondering how far they're going to misinterpret combines and what that's going to lead to," he said in January. We were in the kitchen of his New York establishment, a former Catholic orphanage on Lafayette Street, which he uses as a pied-à-terre and an office for his private curator, David White, and a small staff; the large rooms on three of its floors also serve as galleries where curators, selected graduate students, and others can come to look at recent or vintage Rauschenbergs. Rocky, the desert turtle who has lived here for forty years, was thumping around on the kitchen floor. Lethal-looking but harmless, Rocky, whose name resonates in the ROCI project, was one of thirty turtles that Rauschenberg rented from Trefflich's animal store to participate in his 1965 performance piece called "Spring Training," during which they were let loose on a darkened stage with flashlights taped to their shells. When I arrived, on the day after his "Scenarios" show opened at PaceWildenstein, Bob was sitting at the kitchen table, watching "Dr. Phil."

"My career is unknown to me," he said. "Other people seem to understand it, but I'm not that interested. I think it's sort of indecent to have things so worked out that they end up like you thought they should. You think I want to be what I am?" (Much laughter at this.) "You just have to expose yourself to more, and see what the consequences are."

I asked if he could define the strongest element in his work. He thought for a minute or so, nodding, still not taking his eyes from the TV screen. "Perseverance," he said. "Curiosity. That I don't know where I'm going but I'll get there on time."

For some reason, we started talking about John Cage, the irrepressibly original composer, who had been, in the nineteen-fifties, the closest thing to a mentor in Rauschenberg's life. "John and I just had simultaneous thoughts, mutually," he said. "He would do something, and I would think, God, that's brilliant, and then I would do something and it wouldn't surprise him. We made each other feel comfortable in the world, and that's a big one."

In a 1961 essay called "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," Cage wrote what may be the best statement about an artist I've ever read: "Over and over again I've found it impossible to memorize Rauschenberg's paintings. I keep asking, 'Have you changed it?' And then noticing while I'm looking it changes." ♦

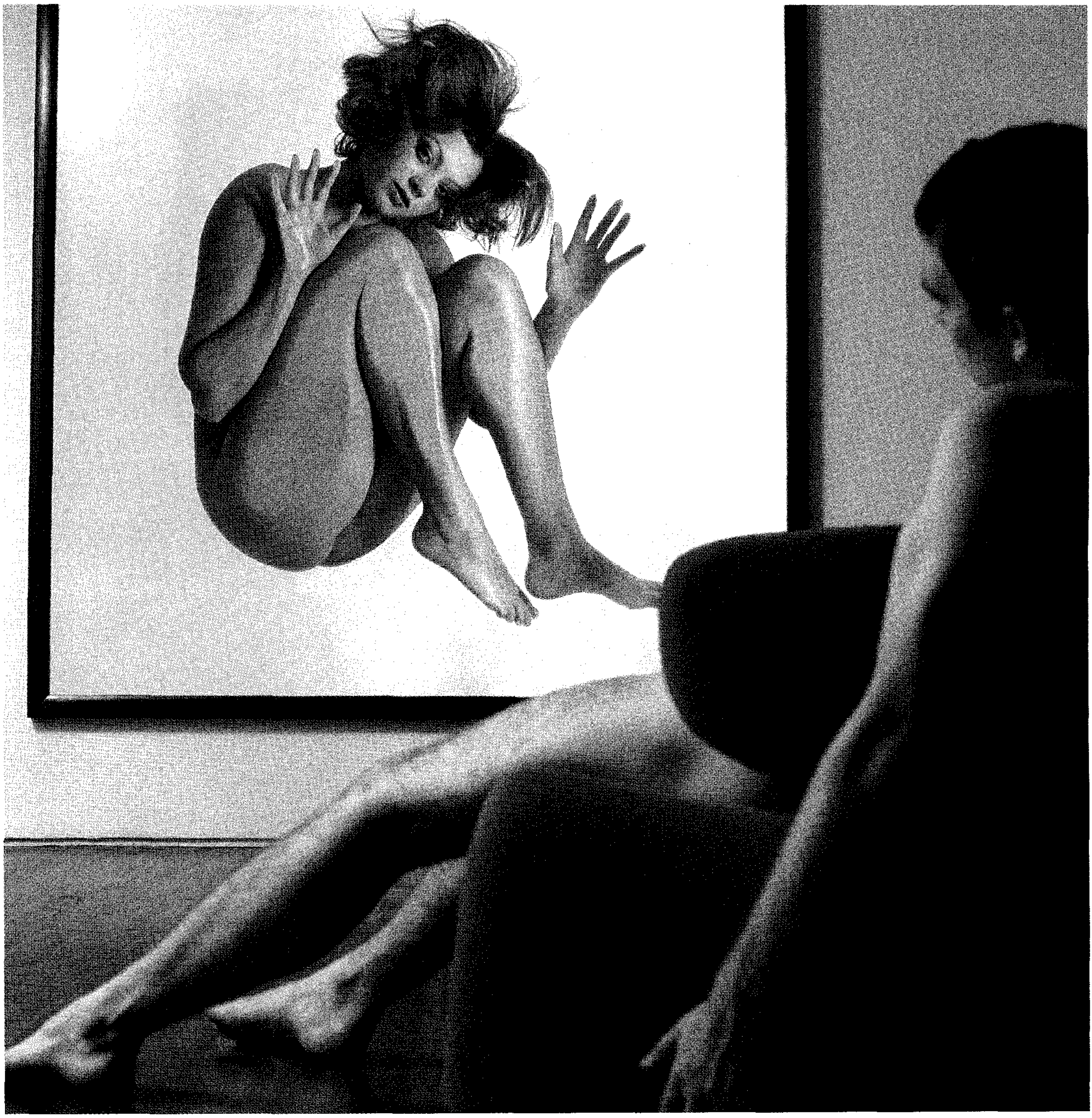


"What would you suggest that would make a nine-year-old boy's mother happy?"

FICTION

TWO'S COMPANY

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN



And then the perfect couple, Pam and Paul, who first hooked up in college, co-writing operettas and co-founding a cabaret, went on to amaze their classmates by marrying in Reno six months before they even graduated, and finally, at a combined age of forty-three, set up shop in California as a comedy-writing duo. They were still only twenty-seven when NBC picked up their pilot for a series about suburban teen-agers with funny yesteryear hair styles and funny yesteryear teen difficulties. Every Wednesday night, for the next five seasons, tens of millions of smiling Americans watched the heart icon in the show's closing credit ("A PAMELA BURGER ♥ PAUL MATHER CREATION") twinkle once to the sound of a little chime. In joint appearances at their alma mater's Career Day—Pam resembling a freckly Bartlett pear, Paul a cartoon scallion with well-gelled rootlets—the two of them dispensed encouragement to aspiring young writers. "Work hard, don't compromise, never settle for the easy deal," Pam said. "Failing that," Paul said, "at least make sure the easy deal is for eight figures." The happy couple, whose three Emmies had the effect of confirming the literary rightness of their relationship, retired from the show in 1998, sold their bungalow in Santa Monica, and bought a thirty-acre spread up in the mountains, because, as they quipped in joint interviews with their old hometown papers in North Carolina and Massachusetts, Paul had become psychologically incapable of remembering whether the "O" in "Michael Ovitz" was long or short and therefore couldn't appear in public anymore.

At their mountain hideaway, to which, for a pleasant few weeks, magazines sent reporters to profile them and transcribe Paul's one-liners, they were attempting to write an original romantic comedy. ("We want to push each other creatively," Pam told *Good Housekeeping*. "Pam, for example," Paul said, "has taken to pushing me creatively down the stairs.") Despite several months of pushing, however, they remained nowhere with the script until, one Monday morning, the FedEx truck arrived with a copy of their latest profile in *L.A. Weekly*. Pam saw the headline of the article, "TWO'S COMPANY," and was thunderstruck. "Two's Company": perfect title! "The thing we know *best* is the romance of marriage," she declared. "The world doesn't need another gag about a girl with come in her hair. The world doesn't need another drama about adultery. What would be truly original, at this cultural moment, would be a straight-up celebration of monogamy. To create a couple who are so funny together, so right for each other, that you're rooting for the marriage from the very first frame."

Paul, who was frowning unhappily at the photograph that accompanied the profile, said that he agreed with her—mostly. His only tiny worry was that a too perfect couple might come across as more cutesy than ha-ha funny. As possibly even outright irritating. He also wondered what to make of the fact that the funniest married movie couple he could think of offhand, Nick and Nora Charles, were hopeless drunks. "Just, you know, wondering," he said.

Pam said she didn't see why Paul was being so pissy. To prove him wrong, she went to her study, which was a den of deep-pile silk rugs and pillows the size of armchairs, to create some scenes of a marriage that was both perfect and hilarious. Paul's own office contained a four-drawer file cabinet and a folding chair. He went out to the pool and dutifully opened a notebook for one of the three pilots that he and Pam were contractually obligated to develop. In this one, called "Playing House," two great-looking high-school seniors get married after their parents, who are friends, are killed together in a helicopter crash, and the newlyweds have to learn how to behave like grownups with big mansions and millions of dollars and how to cope with being C.E.O.s of the family businesses even though they're still just eighteen and applying to colleges. Paul, for whom first drafts tended to be a torment, had uncharacteristically looked forward to writing the scene in which the two kids lie in bed in their middle-aged pajamas and lament the shrivelment of their sex drive; but now he didn't see the humor in it. He felt compelled, instead, to go and lock himself in the guesthouse bathroom with a head shot of the twenty-year-old actress, Tracy Gill, whom he was hoping to cast in the pilot's lead female role, and when he emerged from the guesthouse, nearly an hour later, his mood extremely sour, he went straight to his vintage yellow BMW roadster and gunned its extravagantly polluting engine and steered it toward the city.

Paul's childhood had been the stuff of comedy. His father was ordained as a Presbyterian minister but left the Church to work in human resources at Raytheon and devote his leisure time to sports betting and solitary drinking while Paul's mother found Jesus, moved to Colorado, and started a second family with an Air Force colonel whom Paul, as an adolescent, dreamed of murdering with a hatchet. At boarding school, he took to wearing all black and smoking black Sobranies, and he helped form a literary comedy troupe that played scenes like the tsar's near-execution of Dostoyevsky for slapstick. Paul's favorite role was a cheerful Jehovah's Witness who kept tapping on Sylvia Plath's kitchen door while she was trying to kill herself; he also liked to play Sartre's alter ego, Roquentin, and stare at a tree root until its disgusting raw existence made him barf.

When Pam discovered Paul, in their second week of college, he was a gaunt loner who was almost as disdainful of girls as he was of alcohol and sports. On his dinner tray, the night she plunked her own tray down beside it, were three dishes of jello cubes, one dish of vanilla pudding, two glasses of Pepsi, and one flagrant turkey cutlet. Pam's opening line was "Are you sure you should eat that cutlet?" By Thanksgiving, she was well on her way to having civilized him. She took him home to Durham and introduced him to her plump, jolly parents. Her father had co-written the standard college intro text in macroeconomics, and every time the family needed another million dollars he put out a new edition. ("This is my private mint," he snickered, showing Paul his home office.) The father gave him tutorials in wine appreciation, the mother taught him to say the family motto in Latin—"Someday we'll look back on this and it will all seem funny"—and every night, in Pam's bedroom, which the parents had winkingly forbidden Paul to enter after 10 P.M. ("There'll be hell to pay, young man, if you so much as lay a finger on our daughter!"), Pam unstoppered the carnal energies that had long been building up in the steel-clad cooker of Paul's New England psyche. Prior to Paul, Pam herself had been naked only with a French exchange student, whose thick accent and single-minded pursuit of sex later became the basis for the amusing character of Pierre on her and Paul's hit TV series, but she was such a well-loved child that she was neither surprised nor frightened when the strange, intense Yankee she'd picked out for herself became obsessively devoted to her; she took it as her due.

Which was, perhaps, Paul felt, as he drove his roadster down the 101, both the excellent and comforting thing about Pam and the root of his problem now: her lack of doubt. The funniest lines in their work, the lines with that satisfying crackle of sadism, were mostly his, but he was aware that it was Pam's confidence and Pam's higher tolerance for cliché that had won them their big contracts. And now, because she wasn't engineered for doubt, Pam seemed to think it didn't matter that she'd gained fifteen pounds since moving to the mountains and that she was thumping around the house with the adipose aquiver in her freckled upper arms; she certainly seemed not to care that they hadn't had sex since before Labor Day; and she'd been pointedly deaf to certain urgent personal-grooming and postural hints that Paul had dropped during their photo shoot for *L.A. Weekly*. Indeed, the person he now imagined murdering with a hatchet was that paper's photo editor, who, Paul was certain, had deliberately selected a shot in which Pam looked like Jackie Gleason, in order to punish her for her complacency and to ridicule Paul for his too sincere avowal, in a paragraph not three inches from Pam's splotchy face, that everything good in his life he owed to her.

He felt trapped and isolated by the freakish particulars of a romance that Pam, even now, was endeavoring to celebrate in a film script. He wished that he could call up some other woman, but it seemed to him unlikely that there was a single attractive female in all of Southern California who had not been nauseated by his and Pam's repeated public declarations of their delight in each other. And so, arriving at the little office of Mathburger Productions, he simply took what he had driven down for—an old, lovingly preserved folder of his high-school scripts, and a Tracy Gill career-compilation video that his assistant had put together and that Paul was hoping might include a few scenes that Gill now regretted having shot.

Pam, meanwhile, was laughing out loud while writing her pages. These pages concerned a slightly neurotic but charming couple, Sam and Paula, who arrive in Maui for a week's vacation. Paula, whom Pam described as "extremely attractive in a thinking man's way," has managed to convince herself, despite turning the heads of the resort's buff male staffers, that she is old and dowdy and losing her appeal, and a deftly handled series of comic misunderstandings quickly persuades her that Sam is flirting with a brainless bombshell, Kimbo, whom, in reality, he couldn't care less about.

"Uh, and why couldn't he?" Paul said when Pam, after a month of hard work, finally showed him Act I.

"Because she's a big-titted dolt," Pam answered. "You know, the kind of person you'd expect a guy to be drooling over, which is what makes Paula so paranoid, which is what makes Sam feel like he's so busted, when in fact—"

"In fact what?"

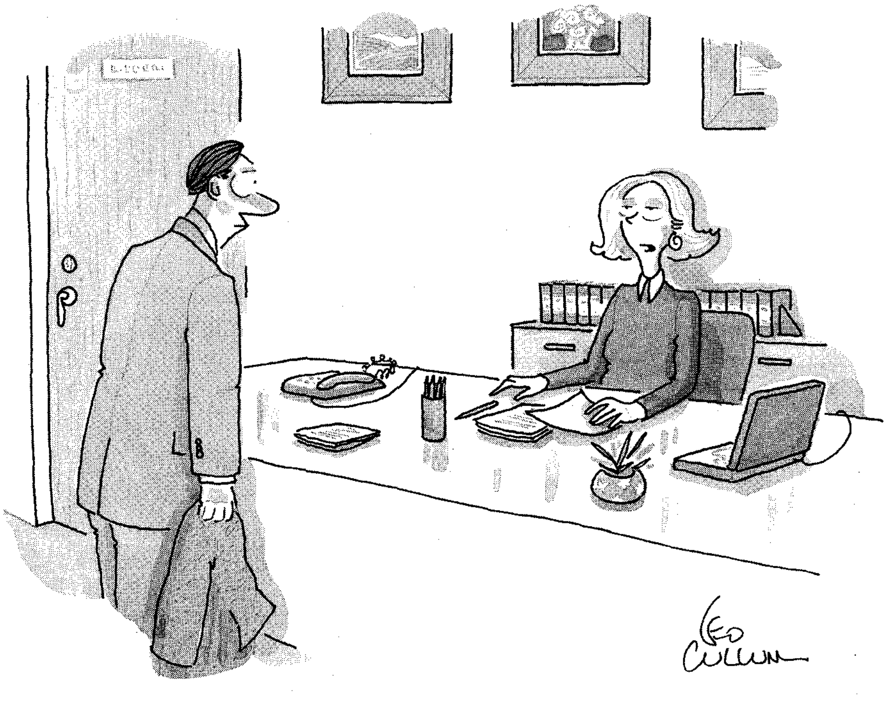
"In fact, he's *embarrassed* by how uninterested he is in Kimbo. You know, like, what's wrong with him? All the other guys in Maui are drooling over this girl. And Sam is like, Am I gay? Am I less of a man for being monogamous? Because the idea here is that it's hard, it's *comically awkward*, to still be so in love with his wife after all these years, while there's this huge cultural pressure for him to be hitting on little chicklets like Kimbo."

After a pause, Paul nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, O.K. I get it. That's interesting. But what if, then, in Act II—"

"No," Pam said in a voice that made Paul wonder if she were quite as oblivious as he'd thought. "I've been thinking about this sixteen hours a day," she said, "and no. That's the totally obvious beat: she suspects him, her suspicion gives him ideas, he tries to act on these ideas, compromising positions, crisis in marriage, love affirmed, lesson learned, happy ending."

"No, I agree, that's stale," Paul said. "It's just, why does Kimbo (unfunny name, by the way) have to be so cartoonish? Why can't she be like Paula, only younger? Kind of a thinking man's beautiful twenty-year-old?"

"Well," Pam said, "because that wouldn't be funny. Apart from that one little problem, its total lack of funniness, it's a great idea."



"While you were out, sir, the company, rudderless and adrift, operated pretty much the same as always."

Paul retreated to his own study to view the regrettably quite PG-rated Tracy Gill video for the fourth or fifth time and to reread his high-school scripts and imagine them as the basis for a "Monty Python" cum "Fractured Fairy Tales" type of cable comedy hit. It was the surprisingly durable brilliance of these scripts that gave him the courage finally, after painful hesitation, to pick up his phone and call Gill's agent to arrange a private pre-meeting meeting with the potential star of his and Pam's potential new hit series.

The meeting took place at a Starbucks in Westwood at two on a Tuesday afternoon. Paul's only serious complaint with the lovely Gill, in person, was that she had brought along her mother.

Mrs. Gill reminded Paul of his own mother. Her first question was "What exactly does the phrase 'pre-meeting meeting' mean?" Her second question was "Where's your wife?" Her third question was "Why aren't we meeting at your office?" Her fourth question was "Why did you not want Tracy's agent here?"

Paul's answers to these questions were syntactically complex. To change the subject, he went ahead and pitched his idea for a cable show based on his high-school scripts. Tracy Gill averred, with a squeal, that she'd just read "The Bell Jar." Mrs. Gill asked Paul what he thought was funny about a young mother putting her head inside an oven.

The meeting was over in thirty-five minutes. Back up in the mountains, after a high-speed drive that Paul spent picturing a hatchet buried in Mrs. Gill's forehead, he found his overweight wife by the pool. He was breathless with wrongdoing. His wife asked him to guess who had just telephoned her, but Paul couldn't. "Tracy Gill's mother," Pam said.

Paul stopped breathing altogether. "You and Tracy Gill's mother have been talking on the phone?"

By way of reply, Pam gathered her robe around her and stood up. "Paul," she said, "I want you to move out. Right away."

Her words were so unexpected, and they made Paul feel so guilty and fearful, that even though he was basically sick to death of Pam he tried to defend himself and argue for their marriage: "You're splitting up with me because I had coffee with Tracy Gill and her mother?"

Pam shook her head. "It's just that, before I go any further with the script," she said, "I want you at a different address."

Paul said, "Are you out of your mind? You think I'd actually try to steal credit?"

"At this point, Paul, I'd consider you capable of almost anything."

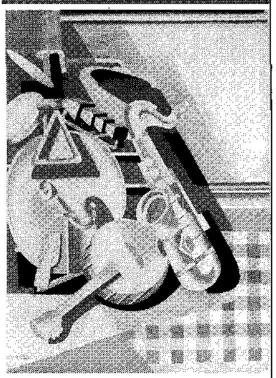
"Even, my God, the crime of drinking coffee at two in the afternoon!"

"You had your chance to sign on with this project," Pam said. "I gave you weeks and weeks and weeks."

"This project," Paul cried, "is a fraudulent, wishful middle-aged woman's fantasy!"

To which Pam simply shook her head and said, "You are such a disappointment to me."

A month later, as part of their separation agreement, Paul signed an affidavit in which he renounced all claims to "Two's Company." Pam's publicist confided to *Variety*, "He's a really nice guy, but she's been carrying him for years. It finally just got to be too much." After "Two's Company" grossed a hundred and ten million in theatres, and Pam was photographed looking twenty pounds thinner than Paul had ever seen her, even in college, and she hooked up with a boy so chiselled and pectoral that even if he wasn't gay he should have been, and she went on to produce more comedies for an older female audience, each more profitable than the last, Paul came to see that what had looked to him like a wishful fantasy had been a fantasy only because he personally had not believed in it: because it offended his taste. Back in Pamland, the wish was still congruent with reality; and every ticket for a film of hers, every video rental and every rave review on AM radio, was like another vote to ratify her reality at the expense of his. The whole country was against him, and so he moved to New York City, where, well-insulated financially, he worked on recasting his comic literary vignettes as little formalist short stories that he mailed out to journals. You could see him at a certain kind of party, standing near open windows, wearing black, smoking cigarettes, and hoping to talk about his favorite subject, which was the badness of his ex-wife's films. ◆



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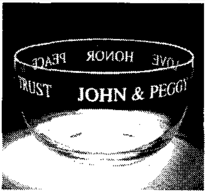

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THE CRITICS

IN FASHION

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

The House of Chanel at the Met.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

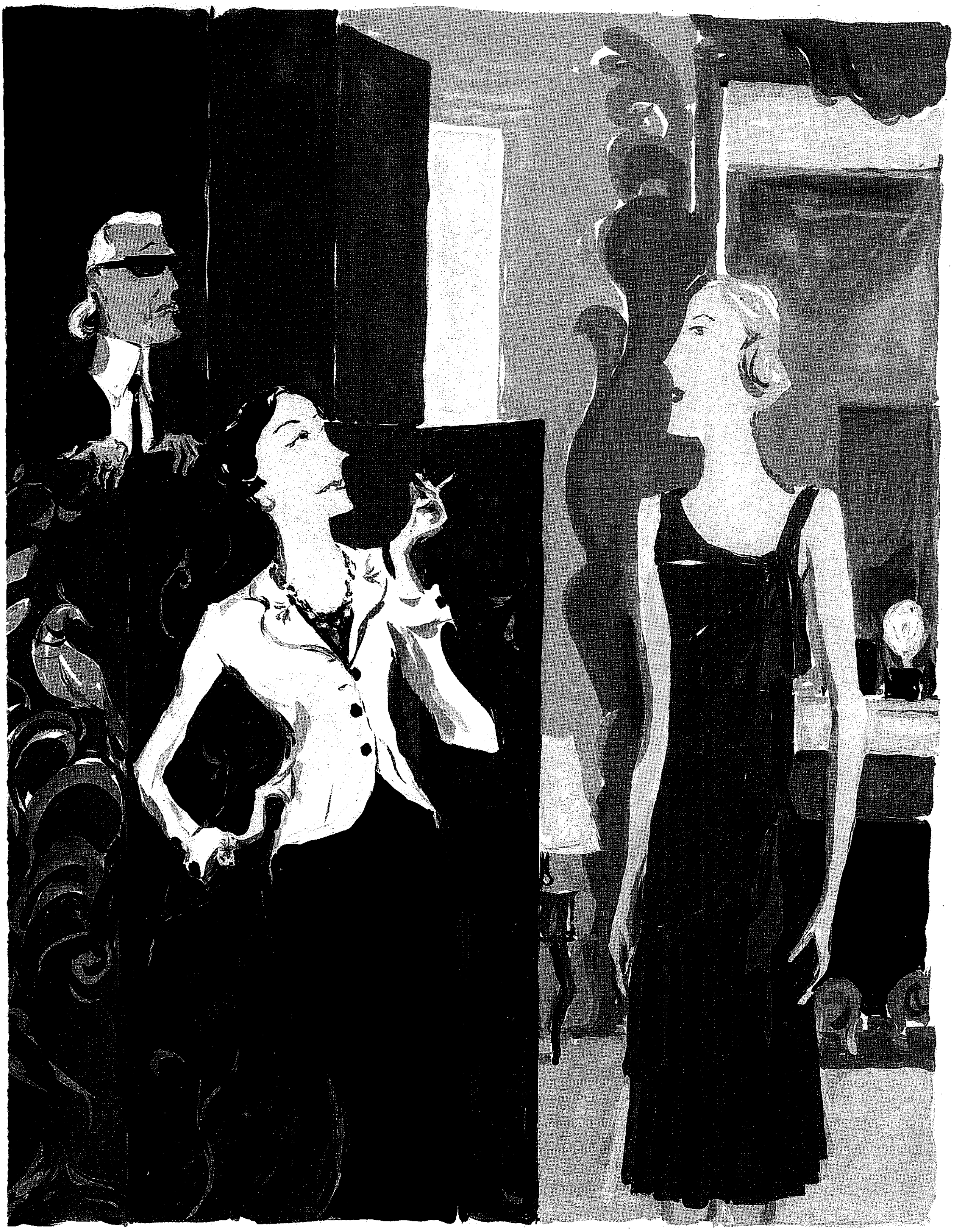
I once had a chance to buy a couture suit by Chanel that was made sometime in the nineteen-fifties, her comeback years. She had closed her *maison de couture,* on the Rue Cambon, when war was declared in 1939, and reopened it in 1954, when she returned to France, at seventy-one, from self-imposed exile in Switzerland. The stories of her attempts to wrest control of Chanel Parfums from her partners, the Wertheimer family, by exploiting the Nazi race laws, and of her startling offer to Hitler's secret-police chief to broker a negotiated peace with her old friend Winston Churchill—a farcical operation code-named Modellhut (fashion hat) by Chanel's S.S. handlers—have always somewhat dampened her charm for me. But the suit was a classic tweed in opalescent pink, with flecks of mauvish blue and a selvage trim, a slightly flared skirt that grazed the knee, and a boxy jacket with her signature cropped sleeves and narrow armholes. The dealer who was selling it, a Frenchwoman, sized me up—literally—before she let me try it on. She had been keeping it under wraps in her back room like a rare piece of erotica, waiting for the right customer.

Except for the thrilling virtuosity with which it is made, there is very little sex appeal to a mid-century Chanel suit. It is a conventional and even dowdy uniform if one wears it without some wink of impiety. But it keeps faith with an enlightened notion that refuses to die, no matter how hard its adversaries—the Versaces of the world—try to kill it, and one which we owe almost entirely to Chanel: that a woman is entitled to dress with the same dignity, comfort, and self-possession as a man.

Chanel died in 1971, at the age of eighty-seven, with no heirs except a trusted manservant. She left her estate to a foundation in Liechtenstein, and, according to Axel Madsen, the author of a thorough biography, "A Woman of Her Own," its value was estimated at thirty million dollars. By then, the Wertheimer family, secretive patricians who amassed a fortune in cosmetics, owned the House of Chanel. For a few years, they did nothing with it except to continue to market the perfumes, and to pay rent on a small boutique on the Rue Cambon, which sold accessories. Eventually, they hired a new designer, who has since vanished from the scene, and introduced a line of ready-to-wear. In 1983, the president, Kitty D'Alessio, lured Karl Lagerfeld away from Chloé, and made him the creative director. His mandate was to raise the profile of the brand and to rejuvenate—which in the aggressive fashion climate of the early eighties meant to sex up and trick out—the Chanel style, and he did so with a bravura or a brashness, depending on one's point of view, that seemed to some critics and clients a betrayal of the Chanel patrimony. But as Lagerfeld began to define a creative identity that was both separate from Chanel and consonant with his interpretive role as her steward, he reliably produced superior collections.

A new show of couture, ready-to-wear, jewelry, accessories, and toiletries by Chanel and Lagerfeld, which opened at the Metropolitan Museum on May 5th and runs until August 7th, pays homage to Chanel's purism. It is curated by Harold Koda and his associate, Andrew Bolton, of the Met's Costume Institute. They have mounted a number of exhibitions in the claustrophobic basement where couture is usually displayed, which nevertheless captured the poetry of fashion. This production involved bigger interests and egos. It received "extravagant support" from its sponsor, Chanel, Inc., Koda told me, though he declined to quantify it; "additional support" from Condé Nast; and advice from Lagerfeld, a man of imperious opinions that he has never been shy about expressing. (A Chanel show planned five years ago by Koda's predecessor, the late Richard Martin, was cancelled by mutual agreement when the Met bridled at Lagerfeld's demands.) But this time, Koda said at a press conference on the day of the annual Costume Institute Ball, speaking in the Great Hall of the museum, "there couldn't have been a show without Karl's interventions." The catalogue is a luxuriously pristine example of the printer's art, thanks in part to Lagerfeld, who hand-tinted the cover and the digitally processed photographs.

The installation, elevated to the Met's main floor, was designed, on Lagerfeld's recommendation, by Olivier Saillard, a program director at the Musée de la Mode et du Textile, in Paris. Its cool, almost clinical rigor celebrates Chanel's allegiance to the aesthetics of modernism. Nineteen modular "vitrines"—white cubes open on one side—are aligned in a grid against the black walls of a windowless gallery, giving visitors the illusion of strolling through the shopping streets of a bungalow colony on the dark side of the moon. Within each module, two, three, or six mannequins, faintly rouged and coiffed in white feathers, display sixty-three ensembles from eight decades. The earliest is an evening gown by Chanel, circa 1917-20, of black silk tulle with a fringe of paillettes; the latest an evening dress by Lagerfeld from spring/summer 2005, of black silk lace and chiffon. The ensembles are grouped by color, mood, shape, material, and affinity (little black dresses; Gypsy exuberance; "orientalist-moderne" lamé; ro-



Chanel would seem like an obvious candidate for a retrospective, but Lagerfeld is quoted in the show as "detesting" retrospectives.

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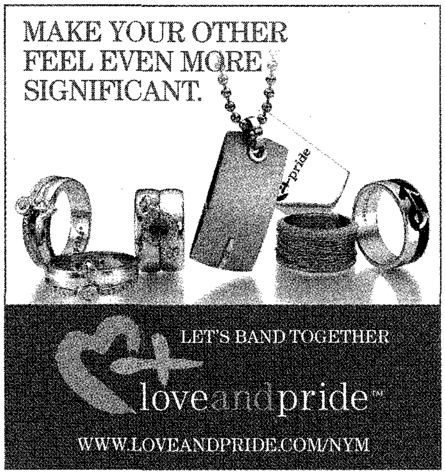

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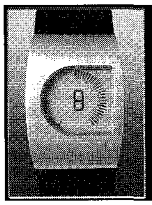
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mantic lace; permutations of the suit) rather than by period, as they would be in a retrospective, a genre for which Chanel seems like an obvious candidate. But Lagerfeld is quoted in the show as "detesting" retrospectives, and the curators believe that couture deserves to be looked at without extraneous or sensational distractions. "We don't do the biography thing," Koda told me. "That's my bias. Chanel wouldn't be remembered if it wasn't for the work."

The deceptive simplicity of Chanel's work makes her an elusive subject. Her couture is easy to find beautiful, but its artistry, Koda noted, is "hard to read," which might have been a good reason to provide some context for it—a social history, one of several filmed interviews, or a portrait of Chanel at work. A visceral sense of the woman has been sacrificed to aesthetics, the way personal objects are banished from a modernist décor (though Chanel's décors were rich and eclectic). Koda hoped that by using Lagerfeld's work as a "foil" he could start "a dialogue," and supply some of the missing tension. But the conceit of then-and-now Chanel suits side by side in a white box isn't a recipe for lively conversation. Perhaps the foils to juxtapose with Chanel were her contemporaries in fashion. She wasn't a fount of invention, like Schiaparelli; a technical innovator, like Fortuny or Vionnet; or an impresario, like Poiret, although she did design memorable costumes for Cocteau, Diaghilev, and Jean Renoir. Her own rules of the game, distilled over the decades, were a core of beliefs that were as much about womanhood and its paradoxes as about clothing.

"Balzac has invented everything," Colette wrote, and he might have invented Chanel, had she not done it with such panache herself. Gabrielle Chanel was born in 1883, in Saumur, a city of the Loire Valley, where her parents, who already had a mildly retarded daughter and were not yet married, had settled briefly. Her father, Albert, was an itinerant peddler descended from peasants and tavern keepers, and her mother, Jeanne, was a seamstress with a fragile constitution that was further strained by a vagabond's life, a faithless husband of incorrigible charm, and the birth of six children. She died at thirty-two, when Gabrielle was eleven, and Albert sent his sons to live with relatives and his daughters to a high-walled convent orphanage (he never came back to retrieve them), where the nuns taught them to sew. Six years later, Gabrielle was given the choice of taking the veil or leaving. Her maternal grandmother arranged for another convent to take her in—a boarding school in Moulins, a garrison town where the élite 10th Light Horse Cavalry happened to be stationed—and in 1903, when she was twenty, her teachers found her a respectable situation. She went to work for a draper and his wife who liked to employ the nuns' charity cases—humble maidens, they imagined, handy with a needle. Many years later, Chanel described herself at that age as a restless misfit "with a hot little body." She told her friend Paul Morand, "Arrogance is in everything I do. It is in my gestures, the harshness of my voice, in the glow of my gaze, in my sinewy, tormented face."

There were no respectable situations for a girl like Chanel in a garrison town. She freelanced at a local cabaret as a *poseuse*—one of the pretty extras who filled in between the artistes' numbers with a few songs, then passed a hat. Though she couldn't carry a tune, the soldiers found her adorable, and they called her Coco, the name of a pet in one of her coy ditties. On weekends, she moonlighted at a tailor's shop patronized by the officers, and it was there that she met Étienne Balsan, her first protector. He was the black sheep of a rich family, a famous polo player and horse breeder who owned a château near Compiègne, where Chanel learned to ride, and acquired a number of other skills that the nuns had neglected. For a while, she overlapped with Balsan's outgoing mistress, Émilienne d'Alençon, the great Belle Époque demimondaine, and one of Coco's early promoters.

Though Chanel never referred to her convent years, and in her novelistic memoirs translated the word "nuns" into "aunts," and the orphanage into a farmhouse of dour spinsters, she also never outgrew what Edmonde Charles-Roux, one of her best biographers, calls "a yearning for austerity." However gratefully Chanel might have recalled the gallants who initiated her into the idle and racy life of an apprentice courtesan, it came

COMING TO THAT

"If it comes to that," he said, "there'll be no
preventing it,"
his voice almost a whisper. Had I got it right,
hearing him?
"If it comes to that" is what he said, and,
as if talking
to himself, went on about how there'd be no
preventing it.
He had come to that conclusion in his long
finality of
coming to that, whatever that was it might
come to before
not being prevented—and as if such a thing
were for him
the unthinkable, and would prevail, if it
came to that.

And while listening more closely now to
what he said,
I realized if no one paid him heed it would
be as if he
hadn't said it—if it came to that—and would
then not be
prevented from falling to forces known to
care little for
what he said, even when they heard it, their
being wily
and forceful enough to make sure it would
come to that.

—*Dorothea Tanning*

with its own set of humiliations. Perhaps as a result, the little grisette passed among playboy friends refused ever to fetishize another woman—and that was the moral principle (one of the few) on which Chanel founded her career.

Modernism was in part a response to the artifice and dandyism of the fin de siècle, which may have suggested another of Chanel's working axioms: the simplest solution has the greatest authority. She made her début in fashion as a milliner who, in an era of exorbitant plumage, stripped the trimming from her hats, and went on from there. In Charles-Roux's recently reissued "Chanel and her World" (Vendome; $50), a life in pictures adapted from her biography, there is a photograph of Coco at thirty (she always looked a decade younger than she was), posing on the rocky beach at Deauville, hatless and windblown, in front of a weathered cabana. One hand is deep in the pocket of a chunky fisherman's chemise with a middy collar and rolled cuffs, and she has thrust a flower into the belt. The picture was taken in the summer of 1913, when Chanel opened her first *maison de couture* on a fashionable street next to the Deauville casino. It was financed by the English polo player, writer, and industrialist for whom she had left Balsan, Arthur (Boy) Capel, her great love. And it was here that Chanel staged her coup: the introduction of supple cardigan suits, devoid of embellishment, that skimmed an uncorseted body. They were made from jersey tricot—a cheap fabric used for the men's underwear and work clothes that her father had peddled. The ladies of Deauville woke up one morning to discover a shocking deficit of chic between their own clothes and *la mode Chanel.* It was the difference between a regime of frivolity and one of nonchalance.

The First World War made Chanel's name—rich Parisians escaping at short notice to Deauville flocked to her shop to replenish their wardrobes. (Among her many gifts, one of the greatest was a genius for timing.) She, in turn, gave a clientele who were suddenly emancipated by adversity, and by the departure of their men, clothes they could walk, drive, and work in. By the early twenties, those women, and their daughters, were game for sports, cigarettes, enterprise, speed, divorce, short skirts, bobbed hair (Chanel had cropped her own luxuriant tresses in 1917), and the exquisitely unpretentious "little black dress"—"a Ford signed Chanel," as *Vogue* captioned one of them. Paul Poiret, her leading rival, dismissed her sumptuary reforms as *la misère de luxe*, and in one respect he was right. To wear them smartly, you needed the adolescent body of the undernourished waif she had been.

Chanel was always her own best model, and she was proud to say that she never designed a dress that she wouldn't have worn. Her style was a synthesis of feminine softness and masculine ease, the gossamer and the tweedy. If she appropriated certain virile entitlements the way she borrowed her lovers' sweaters and overcoats—and elements from the uniforms of their grooms, gamekeepers, and crewmen—there was no militance to her chic. Her original distinction was to have rescued the "New Woman" of the Belle Époque not only from her frumpy bloomers and didactically mannish tailleurs but from her status as an object of ridicule to the "Old Men" of either sex who feared her modernity. Chanel's respect for the appearance of propriety was the adaptive trait of the orphan and shopgirl. Like Joan of Arc, another daughter of the people who acquired a large following of aristocrats, Chanel did so by outclassing them in the lists of purity.

Chanel's tastes were virtually infallible except in romance and politics. She had many passions but few loves, and it amused her to keep younger men, one of whom was Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch, the Tsar's nephew and an alleged assassin of Rasputin. She also hired his sister, the Grand Duchess Marie, to direct the embroidery workshop that produced her sumptuous Russian tunics and tabards of the twenties. Dmitri repaid her generosity with an introduction to Ernest Beaux, a chemist and perfumer, who in 1920 concocted the formula for Chanel No. 5. Though Chanel conceded the distribution rights to the Wertheimers and litigated with them for the next forty years, the royalties made her one of the richest women in France. She moved into a mansion near the Elysée Palace and spent her fortune with abandon: on a Rolls-Royce; Coromandel screens; cascades of diamonds and pearls that she mixed rakishly with her ropes of "amusing trinkets"; and a villa at Roquebrune, in Provence, where she cohabited with the grandest of her consorts, the Duke of Westminster, and entertained the Churchills. Chanel and the Duke tried very hard to conceive a child—he had no heirs—and when they didn't (she was by then forty-two) he married someone else. She consoled herself gamely with a defiant boast: "There have been several Duchesses of Westminster, but only one Chanel."

Despite her wealth, Chanel was a notoriously stingy employer, and she saw no reason that her underpaid fitting models, having spent the day immobile on their feet, shouldn't find it natural—as they were beautiful girls—to spend the night in a supine position earning overtime. But she was generous to her embarrassingly rustic brothers (in part to keep them out of sight), and she quietly paid the expenses of penniless artists, poets, godchildren, and friends. The last of Chanel's known gentlemen gigolos was Hans Gunther von Dincklage, alias Spatz, the suave German officer who shared her suite at the Ritz during the Occupation. When she was arrested after the Liberation of Paris by the Comité d'Épuration, and questioned about this unfortunate alliance, she supposedly retorted to her interrogator, "Really, monsieur, a woman of my age cannot be expected to look at his passport if she has a chance of a lover."

Chanel was released after three hours, and there were, amazingly, no further repercussions. Madsen, who had access to files of the British Foreign Office that were "inadvertently declassified" in 1972, explains why. Churchill's old friend possessed secret information that might have embarrassed him: from 1940 until the end of the war, he had violated his own country's trade embargo with Germany to pay for the upkeep of the French properties owned by the Duke of Windsor. This information was apparently not shared with the Resistance, and neither was the file on Operation Modellhut. Though Chanel was never persona non grata in France, she prudently moved to a resort town near Lausanne, where Spatz joined her, and she later paid "a large sum," Madsen says, to suppress any mention of her name or her activities in the memoirs of Hitler's former police chief.

Lagerfeld was a sixteen-year-old star fashion student in 1954, the year that Chanel went back into business, with a critically disastrous first collection of silk and jersey suits and lace evening gowns that recalled her couture of the thirties, and which the French and British press soundly panned as mumsy and passé. Lagerfeld later told Madsen that he thought Chanel "got it right," and the Americans agreed with him. She was relaunched on this side of the Atlantic by the enthusiasm of editors, buyers, and fashion civilians for ageless, undemanding clothes that restored the comfort women had surrendered to Dior's New Look, and offered relief from the tiresome comedy of the hemline wars that dominated postwar fashion. The youthquake of the sixties never shook Chanel's convictions ("I hate the old little girls," she said of matrons in miniskirts), and she wasn't troubled by the disdain of futurists like Courrèges, who called her "an old Rolls, still in working order, but inert." Her pronouncements grew more oracular, and they acquired an acidity she took no pains to dilute. Jackie Kennedy had "horrible taste," and was responsible for "spreading it all over America." (Madsen notes that Chanel had evidently forgotten about the pink suit.) Saint Laurent, on the other hand, was a young man with "excellent taste," she said. "The more he copies me, the more taste he displays."

Chanel always shrugged at the knock-off artists and pirates who rushed copies into mass production, and she wasn't as vulnerable to them as other designers. Her strength was never novelty, and reproductions couldn't possibly compete with the work of her couture atelier. "She considered imitation homage," her assistant said (to which one might add, she paid herself that homage all the time). When the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture tightened the rules governing press access to the collections, Chanel resigned. "Come to my place and steal all the ideas you can," she told the media. "Fashion isn't made to be canned." As Rhonda Garelick writes in a thoughtful catalogue essay, "shopgirls riding city buses" in head-to-toe faux Chanel "delighted the narcissist" in her "and perhaps the secret populist as well."

Whatever Chanel would have made of the Met show, it is just the sort of meal she preferred—a lean banquet, beautifully plated, that leaves you hungry. But the "narcissist" might have wondered why on earth her seven decades of "iconic" work needed Lagerfeld's as a foil, and the "populist" might have resented the show's solecism. Chanel spoke and speaks to a host of other artists and designers across the spectrum, with whom an open forum would have been more stimulating than a hermetic "dialogue." Koda assured me that Lagerfeld did not have or expect veto power, but the curators made no secret of their anxiety to please him. And here one touches upon the inherent problem with the "extravagant" corporate sponsorship of museum fashion shows—the trap of gratitude. The unseemly promotional hyperbole of the message from Chanel's chief operating officer which introduces the catalogue serves as a reminder that the sponsor's interest, however philanthropically packaged, is brand awareness, and publicity is the forge that heats the double "C." A museum's obligation is to retain its cool-headed autonomy.

Lagerfeld in his own right is a virtuoso, and more versatile than Chanel in certain respects. Some of the loveliest couture in the show—the ivory cocktail suit of spun-sugar bouclé, with a dissolving hem; the romantically tiered evening dress of black tulle, with a trompe-l'oeil cummerbund of silver threadwork and rhinestones—is, in fact, his handiwork. But Chanel asked one unsparing question of every stitch she made, of every flourish or tuck on a dress: Is it essential? And if one asks the question about Lagerfeld's place in this show at the Met, which should have been Chanel's show, not a Chanel show, the answer is no. ♦

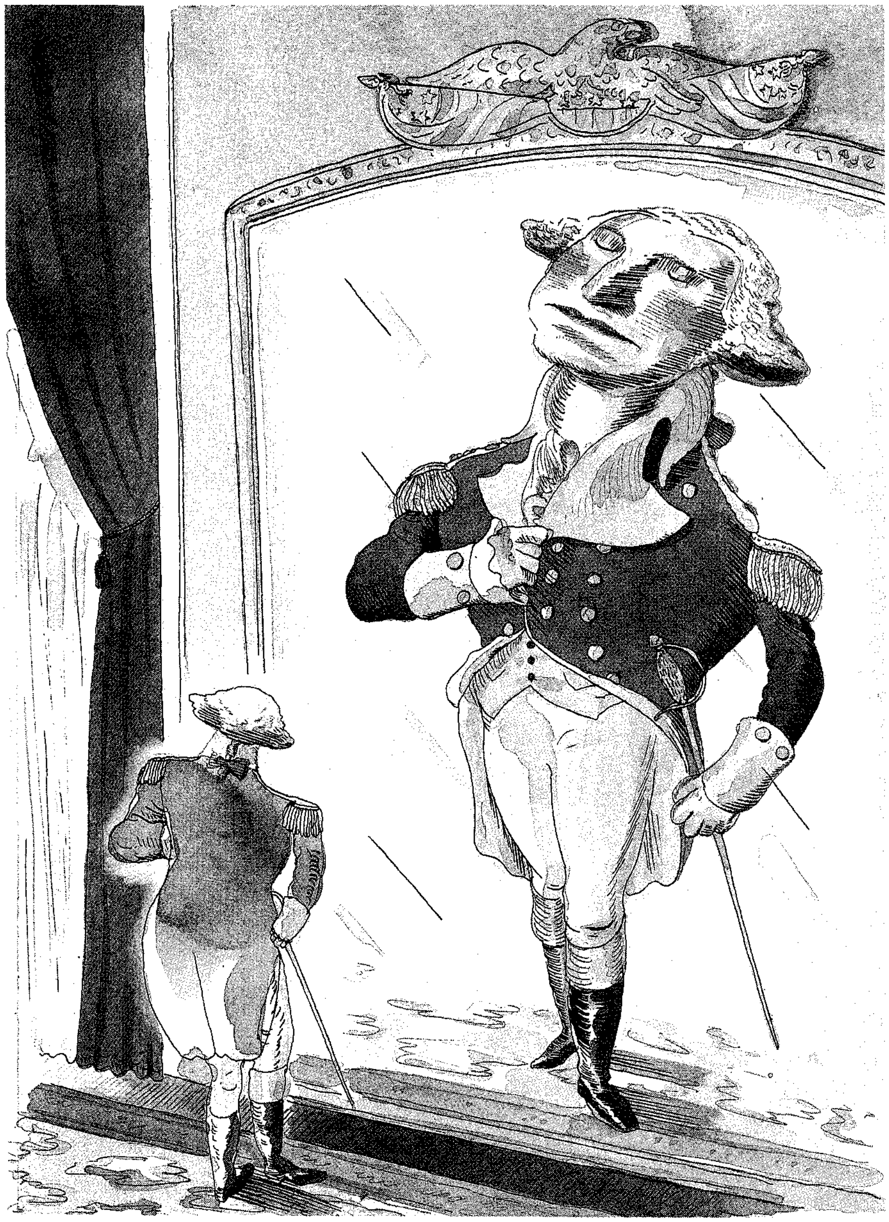
BOOKS

NATIONAL TREASURE

In the year 1776, character was destiny.

BY JOSHUA MICAH MARSHALL

As scenes of heroism go, it was an odd one. In the third week of July, 1776, only days after Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress, His Excellency General George Washington, commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, was involved in a fastidious exchange with his British counterpart, Lord Richard Howe. On July 14th, as the Royal Navy sent ship after ship into New York Harbor, Howe dispatched a young lieutenant, Philip Brown, with a letter addressed to "George Washington, Esq." Brown arrived on Manhattan Island under a flag of truce, and on the shore to meet him were three of Washington's most trusted officers. Hearing that he had brought a letter from "Lord Howe to Mr. Washington," they rebuffed him, declaring that there was "no person in our army with that address." Three days later, Howe's emissary returned with a new copy of the letter—this one addressed to "George Washington, Esq., etc., etc."—only to receive the same rebuff.



Before Washington became the father of his nation, he was the father of himself.

BARRY BLITT

Finally, Howe sent to inquire whether *General* Washington would agree to receive a new emissary, Lieutenant Colonel James Paterson. The emissary was escorted to Washington's headquarters, at No. 1 Broadway, for an "interview" conducted with all the crisp formality of eighteenth-century military life. After an exchange of pleasantries, Paterson placed on the table before Washington the same letter that his men had rejected only days earlier. Washington refused to acknowledge it. Hoping to move the conversation along, Paterson pointed out that the "etc., etc." implied everything that might follow. Yes, it does, Washington replied, "and anything."

From there the meeting swiftly reached an impasse. But Howe received the message that Washington had intended to send. Soon after hearing Paterson's report, he informed the King's ministers that there was little hope of a settlement short of war. "Washington had performed his role to perfection," David McCullough writes in "1776" (Simon & Schuster; $32). The whole encounter amounted to a bit of playacting. Yet it was playacting of a serious sort, especially for a newborn country that, for all its bluster, wasn't quite sure it really was a country and had plenty of reason to fear, as the combined Army and Navy of the world's only superpower descended upon it, that it wouldn't remain one for long. Washington engaged in this brief drama not only to let Howe know whom he was dealing with but to show his own men that he could stand up to anybody George III sent against them. Washington's young deputy, Henry Knox, later recounted that Paterson had looked "awe-struck as if before something super-natural," while the General sat unfazed and spoke the language of liberty and republicanism as if he had sprung from the pages of Roman history.

Washington's preoccupation with respect went beyond amour propre. Years later, when he became the country's first President, his abiding aim was to create an America that could command respect

"Shaded blue box on our org chart, meet dotted red arrow."

• •

from the great nations of the earth—that had, as he put it, a "national character." This overlap between personhood and nationhood is a constant theme in the second half of Washington's life, which makes him an apt focus for McCullough, who has long gravitated toward stories that show how individuals can become forces of history. But character, for the man as for the nation, turns out to be something that you make, not something that you discover; Washington, as we learn, was never more completely himself than when he was acting.

The title of the book, "1776," is no mere flourish; the narrative is confined almost entirely to that single year, in which the fledgling Continental Army battled and retreated—mainly retreated—from Boston to New York and then, finally, across a wintry New Jersey to the outskirts of Philadelphia, before snapping back at the battles of Trenton and Princeton. The Continental Congress, sitting at Philadelphia, figures in the narrative as little more than a faraway home office, freely dispensing suggestions and requests that seldom square with the desperate situation at hand. Even the Declaration of Independence, splitting the year in two on July 4th, plays only a cameo role in the story. There are vivid biographical vignettes of Washington's deputies, including Knox and General Nathanael Greene, and of foes like General William Howe (Lord Richard's brother) and George III, but Washington remains the moral axis around which the drama revolves. McCullough, whose books include superb biographies of John Adams and Harry S. Truman, rarely finds his way into clashes of ideas or vast impersonal forces. (The word "equality" gets its only mention halfway through the book.) This is history at the ground level, sometimes even a few inches below. There is squishing mud for soldiers to trudge through, letters about absent loved ones and heartbreaking deaths, driving snow, and battlefields tipped with sun-gleaming bayonets like so many teeth grasping for prey. The prose is vibrant, and there is a telling insight into each character—William Howe, we learn, is valiant and courageous in battle, lackadaisical and self-indulgent when not. But the book is essentially a portrait of the Continental Army's commander.

Washington lacked Adams's intellectual rigor and Jefferson's curiosity, and, unlike younger members of the founding generation, such as Madison and Hamilton, he contributed no signal writings or ideas to American statecraft. Hamilton, who served under him as an aide-de-camp during the war and understood his iconic power, found him admirable but dull. He could even be a poor general, especially in 1776, when he was still learning how to command an army. Yet men held him in awe. Almost everyone who worked with him or around him or came up against him could see his power, usually from the first moment. It was his stature and gravitas, more than anything else, that held the country together through the dark months that followed the Declaration of Independence.

The key fact about the Revolutionary War is that the colonists didn't have to win their independence from Britain so much as they had to fend off Britain's efforts to snatch it back. Before the revolutionary crisis began, in the seventeen-sixties, British dominion had rested lightly on the American colonies. Merchants in port towns who shipped goods overseas had to contend with the King's laws and tariffs, but few other Americans had much contact with either. In the century and a half after the first colonies were established, the mother country had tried to exert real control for only a few short spells. Each time, Crown and Commons soon shifted their attention to some other pressing matter, and the colonists were once more left to their own devices. Royal authority in America collapsed as swiftly as it did because it was scarcely entrenched to begin with, not because there was overwhelming support for the patriot cause.

The fledgling United States had only to avoid being overrun or demoralized. As Washington quickly saw, above all else that meant keeping the Continental Army intact—safe from annihilation in the field and from hunger and disease off it. He proved uniquely suited to the task, although just what it was that set him apart is often difficult to grasp at a remove of two centuries. Sometimes we can make it out only as astronomers discern black holes, from its effects on things nearby. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, claimed that Washington had "so much martial dignity in his deportment that . . . there is not a king in Europe that would not look like a *valet de chambre* by his side." Shortly after making Washington's acquaintance, General Greene, a Rhode Islander who became one of his most trusted deputies, told a friend that Washington's very presence spread "the spirit of conquest . . . through the whole army." Greene hoped that "we shall be taught to copy his example and to prefer the love of liberty in this time of public danger to all the soft pleasures of domestic life and support ourselves with manly fortitude amidst all the dangers and hardships that attend a state of war."

In part, these rapturous assessments simply expressed the excitability of men putting their lives on the line for what seemed a hopeless cause. They needed to see greatness, and so they saw it. But the accounts are too specific and too consistent for that to be the only reason. Soon after Washington's appointment as commander-in-chief, that dour critic of men John Adams told his wife that the Virginian was destined to become "one of the most important characters in the world." Again and again, Washington struck men of his day as an exemplar of ancient republican ideals, almost as though he had stepped from the pedestal of the ages.

Yet here is the crook in the path, something that McCullough reveals but never quite explains: it was all a put-on, an act. For us today, character is bound up with authenticity; someone with "character" doesn't put on airs, doesn't tailor his actions to impress others. Those weren't the standards of Washington's era. When the young Henry Knox first met Washington, he marvelled at the General's "vast ease and dignity." Such ease was not acquired without effort. As McCullough says, Washington was a man of "almost excessive self-command." From an early age, he submitted his entire persona to the most rigorous discipline, shaping everything from his physical bearing to the degree of intimacy that he allowed himself with friends and associates. By the time he took command of the Army, outside Boston, in July, 1775, there was little about him that was not the product of years of conscious artifice. Few men could have been more keenly sensitive to their standing in other men's eyes or more acutely aware of how words and deeds could diminish or enhance their reputation.

One of Washington's moments of triumph came early in 1776. After an eight-month standoff between his ragtag army and the redcoats holed up in Boston, Washington carried out a risky overnight occupation of Dorchester Heights that, in one stroke, made the British hold on Boston untenable. The British would have left soon enough for their own reasons, but Washington's daring and flawlessly executed maneuver buoyed the spirits of men and women throughout the Colonies. Boston's city fathers toasted Washington; Harvard bestowed an honorary degree. He accepted these compliments with due modesty and grace.

In a letter to his brother shortly after the British evacuation, though, he revealed the effort behind his public sangfroid. "No man perhaps since the first institution of armies ever commanded one under more difficult circumstances than I have done," he wrote. "Many of my difficulties and distresses were of so peculiar a cast that in order to conceal them from the enemy, I was obliged to conceal them from my friends, indeed from my own army, thereby subjecting my conduct to interpretations unfavorable to my character."

Some of this intense concern with reputation was typical of Washington's background. He was born into the Virginia élite, and looked every bit a country gentleman—down to the imported English fineries, the foxhunting, and the lordly manner—but he started from a low rung of his caste. It was almost entirely by his own diligence and striving that he climbed to its pinnacle. (He eventually became one of the wealthiest men in the United States.) There was about him something of the parvenu. The Virginia planters of the day cultivated an air of liberality, ostentation, and even recklessness—traits that kept many on the verge of bankruptcy and got a few killed in duels. This wasn't Washington's way. Though he shared their preoccupation with public profile and with the codes of honor, he was, to a remarkable degree, devoted to self-improvement, self-concealment, and a herculean self-control.

How he came by this is a question that has vexed historians for many years. Little is known, for instance, about his youth, in the seventeen-thirties and seventeen-forties. But the death of his father, when Washington was eleven, must have had a formative effect. He was sent to live with an older half brother, and, with all the moving about, he received only seven or eight years of proper schooling. This was far less than most of his peers in the founding generation, and was a lingering source of insecurity. He learned penmanship, writing, and all the other gentlemanly attainments largely on his own.

When he was fourteen or fifteen, Washington wrote out in one of his schoolbooks a list of "101 Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation." Historians have discovered that he copied these from a widely read etiquette manual that originated with a sixteenth-century French Jesuit. It's unclear what to make of these pages—were they a creed to live by or an exercise in penmanship? Most historians still regard this artifact as a key to understanding the man because he appears to have shaped his life according to so many of its maxims. A fair number, to be sure, are mundane pointers on deportment: "In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet." Others, however, focus on what might be termed polite concealment. "When you see a Crime punished, you may be inwardly Pleased; but always shew Pity to the Suffering Offender," Rule 23 reads. Rule 1: "Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present."

It was during his early commands in western Pennsylvania in the seventeen-fifties that Washington seems to have fashioned his demeanor into that required of a leader, slowly walling off all signs of emotional turbulence to become that man of ease and nobility he aspired to be. During the Revolution, when he told his officers to "be easy . . . but not too familiar lest you subject yourself to a want of that respect, which is necessary to support a proper command," he was doing nothing out of the ordinary. But he applied that standard of behavior across the entire range of human relations. Power required distance, he seems to have reasoned; familiarity and intimacy eroded it.

Though many of history's great figures come down to us carved in stone, the records often show them in flesh and blood. Washington, by contrast, was half marble even in life. From the time he emerged as a leader, admirers compared him to those ancient Romans who were willing to give their lives to the cause of liberty. And here, too, the comparison was one that Washington courted. In the monarchical English-speaking world of the eighteenth century, the cult of Rome operated as a sort of republican counterculture, one with a particular hold over the distant colonies. By common consent, Rome was identified with the virtues of manly, self-denying courage and devotion to the common good over the lure of riches, corruption, and sensuous pleasure. When Washington left the Army and retired to Mount Vernon at the end of the war, he wasn't just showing modesty and good judgment. He was also following a script established by the books about ancient Rome that he and his contemporaries had read as youths, and that he had embraced with particular fervor.

Washington's favorite play was "Cato," by Joseph Addison, written a half century before Washington assumed his duties as commander-in-chief. He had seen it staged several times in Williamsburg while serving in Virginia's colonial legislature. The play tells the story of Cato the Younger, a foe of Julius Caesar, who loves Rome and its republican virtues more than all the treasure and fame that the conquering Caesar can offer. Thrown back onto his final redoubt in North Africa, and plotted against by unfaithful allies, Cato finally takes his own life rather than outlive liberty. Today, the drama seems wooden and overwrought—good and evil, honor and treachery are painted on individual characters with a broad brush—but Washington loved it. Looking over the drama of his life, one can often see conscious echoes of the play, and he regularly quoted from it in letters to friends.

In one memorable passage, Cato, shortly before his death, asks that the body of his son Marcus be brought before him:

> Full in my sight, that I may view at leisure
> The bloody corpse, and count those
> glorious wounds.
> —How beautiful is death, when earn'd
> by virtue!
> Who would not be that youth? what pity
> is it
> That we can die but once to serve our
> country!

It was this line that Washington's young spy Nathan Hale put to such good effect ("I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country") just before his British captors hanged him, outside New York, in September, 1776. If Washington heard about Hale's final words, it must have been with satisfaction and even a touch of envy.

John Adams, who knew his Presidents (he'd been one, fathered one, and was acquainted with five others), once wrote that if Washington was not the greatest President, "he was the best actor of presidency we have ever had." The late eighteenth century was caught between two rival ideals: an obsession with self-cultivation and refinement, on the one hand, and a quest for the natural, unaffected moment, on the other. In Washington, the two coexisted, if sometimes awkwardly. His era was more generous than our own about the interaction between authenticity and role-playing. Particularly in his later years, Washington seemed conscious that he was writing history, and he felt a grave responsibility to get every passage just right. On accepting command of the American army, in 1775, he protested that he was unequal to the task and claimed that he had done everything in his power to avoid such a burden falling upon him. If that was so, of course, one wonders why he attended the deliberations of the Continental Congress—the civilian body that would have to choose America's field commander—wearing a military uniform (one that, McCullough notes, he hadn't had cause to wear since the French and Indian War, fifteen years earlier). In letters to a few intimates, we can catch a glimpse of another, less self-controlled Washington. But to suppose that it exposes a more genuine nature is a modern fallacy. His true greatness consisted in his ability to stick to that austere set of rules even in the face of the most trying circumstances and against the most daunting odds.

This is what made Washington the man for his moment during those last two months of 1776—narrated in the final fifty pages of McCullough's account—when, in the dead of winter, he rushed across New Jersey with an army so desperate and debilitated that the British were convinced that the entire rebellion would soon be quelled. Yet, as McCullough says, Washington refused to see it that way. Although he had shown a costly indecision in the battles around New York, his own steady poise kept the army from disintegrating. Like any hero destined for a pedestal, he had his greatest moments when the stakes were highest. Soon, he would thrust back across the Delaware and catch the enemy resting at Trenton, and then, with still more audacity, best them again at Princeton. It was what came of a life's preparation: an act of mastery that began with self-mastery. When Washington rode into Cambridge in July, 1775, to take command of the army, he was finally handed the role for which he had been preparing all his life: himself. ♦

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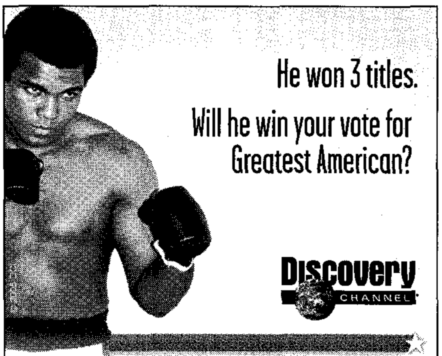
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BRIEFLY NOTED

The Coast of Akron, *by Adrienne Miller (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* In this bewildering first novel, Lowell Haven is a charismatic self-portraitist who lives with his wealthy lover, Fergus, in a multi-turreted folly in Akron. But have Lowell's paintings—of himself as Richard III, as the Wife of Bath, etc.—really been painted by his embittered ex-wife Jenny? Lowell and Jenny's neglected daughter, Merit, dreads dealing with all three of them, and soon so do we: Jenny is an alcoholic, Fergus sneezes with violent frequency, and Lowell seduces anything that moves. Their greatest offense, though, is their two-dimensionality; they're like campy walk-ons in a Republican fever dream. The good news is that Miller can write, and everything about Merit's fairly banal life—her vexing marriage, her erratic driving, her job selling ad space for *Ohio Is*—is described with hilarity and complexity. Unfortunately, these qualities are absent from the rest of the novel, which eventually chokes to death on its own whimsy.

Unformed Landscape, *by Peter Stamm, translated from the German by Michael Hofmann (Handsel; $18).* If Albert Camus had lived in an age when people in remote Norwegian fishing villages had e-mail, he might have written a novel like this. Kathrine, a customs inspector, abandons husband and son, because she's unsure whether she has "missed anything or not." In Paris and beyond, she connects with a series of men, and, after finding the world much as she expected (a garden café in Paris looks "the way a Norwegian who has never seen a garden café might imagine one to look"), returns to her fjord in Finnmark. In Stamm's portrait, a scenario that could have been half-baked captures what seems a particularly Nordic view of adult life: austere pragmatism mixed with mordant wit.

No God but God, *by Reza Aslan (Random House; $25.95).* Aslan, a young Iranian emigrant, lucidly charts the growth of Islam from Muhammad's model community in Medina—depicted as a center of egalitarian social reform—through the chaotic contest to define the faith after the Prophet's death. Within generations, seven hundred thousand hadith—accounts of Muhammad's words and deeds—were in circulation, many "fabricated by individuals who sought to legitimize their own particular beliefs." Out of this muddle was born the primacy of the ulema, Islam's clerical establishment. The ulema, in Aslan's view, foreclosed Koranic interpretation, detoured from the Medinan ideal, and obscured Islam under a thicket of legalistic decrees. Fifteen centuries after Muhammad, Islam has reached the age at which Christianity underwent its reformation; Islam's renewal, Aslan attests, "is already here." However, both modernizers and their "fundamentalist" opposites call themselves reformers, and the victory of the former is not assured.

Art and the Power of Placement, *by Victoria Newhouse (Monacelli; $50).* In this brisk and lavishly illustrated study, our responses to works of visual art are shown to depend, much more than we realize, on the way they are presented. A classical Greek sculpture that once stood in for the god's presence becomes, when transported to imperial Rome, a symbol of conquest. Soft wall textures and muted tones in a museum temper the light and bring out the colors in Impressionist paintings, while hard surfaces dull and flatten them. In a fascinating chapter on Jackson Pollock, Newhouse demonstrates how the tendency of many museums to provide larger and larger wall spaces, in order to accommodate the increasing size of contemporary art works, has done Pollock and others a disservice. Pollock's greatest paintings, mounted on walls that are either too long or too high, can lose much of the explosive energy that made them famous.

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ON TELEVISION

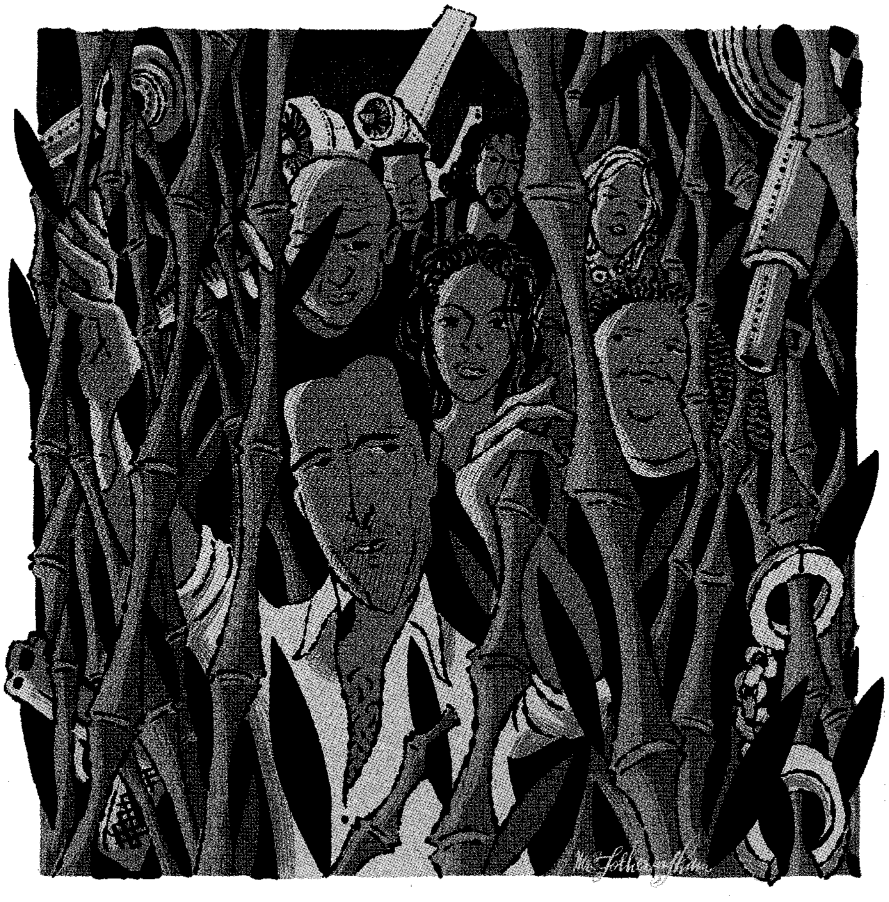
MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

Forty-eight castaways win the prime-time challenge.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Until last fall, ABC's entertainment division had been having such a bad time of it for so long that, as with the used gum that kids offer each other, its initials could have stood for Already Been Chewed. This season, it has been a different—and much crowed-about—story. The network's series "Desperate Housewives," whose juicy title belies its unyielding dullness, became an instant Sunday-night hit upon its début, in October, and it was joined in ratings heaven by the Wednesday-night mystery "Lost." Two months ago, the medical drama "Grey's Anatomy" (think "Ally McBeal, M.D.") premièred, following "Housewives" in the Sunday-night lineup, and it, too, entered the top ten with Flo Jo speed. ABC got so high on its own fumes last fall that it added one or two minutes to the running time of "Housewives" and "Lost"—not for the benefit of viewers but to make a greedy grab for even more millions of eyeballs. (In fact, ABC's practice of deliberately pushing a show over into the next time slot is actively unfriendly to viewers, both those who are watching TV in real time and those who try to set VCRs or DVRs to record a show afterward on another network.)

All three of these new shows have received a lot of media attention—much of it from other ABC outlets, such as "Good Morning America" and "The Oprah Winfrey Show"—but "Lost," for all its mass popularity, qualifies as a kind of cult hit, too. It has elements of the disaster, mystery, adventure, suspense, and horror genres, and it has become a strong presence on the Internet among nerdy gamers and those who like to weave conspiracy theories and sift through clues in TV-show plots in their free time (and probably during work hours as well). The show recalls so many other shows and movies that people can't describe it without resorting to a formula: "Gilligan's Island" meets "Survivor"—or "The Island of Dr. Moreau" or "Lord of the Flies" or "Cast Away." You can throw "Jurassic Park" in there, too, along with a little "X-Files" and "Apocalypse Now." "Lost" actually *was* inspired in part by "Survivor"—the idea came from Lloyd Braun, who used to be the chairman of ABC's entertainment division. (Last fall, he became the head of Yahoo!'s Media Group.) Braun hired J. J. Abrams, the creator of "Alias"—another ABC show that steals minutes that don't belong to it—and the co-creator of "Felicity," to develop the show, along with Damon Lindelof. Abrams, understandably, wasn't interested at first—he recognized that it would be a challenge to come up with enough ideas to drive a series that, since it's set on an island, literally couldn't go anywhere.



Where the wild things are: crash survivors are stranded in the jungle on "Lost."

One of the ways that Abrams met the challenge was by making the show preposterous. "Lost" doesn't tiptoe around the perimeter of preposterousness—it charges right into it. And yet it isn't ridiculous, because Abrams has the courage of his storytelling convictions. (No doubt he does when it comes to his work on "Alias," too. But even though that show's plots are—sort of—more plausible than "Lost," and it has more emotional depth than "Lost" does so far, there is something laughable about it. The heroine of "Alias," an intelligence agent named Sydney, who works for a top-secret branch of the C.I.A. and is played by Jennifer Garner, seems to have been brought into being mainly to serve as a cartoonish action figure for male viewers. Garner's lips are almost always parted in a way that evokes sexual readiness more than it does crime-fighting mental focus. Here are some tidbits from the ABC Web site's description of this season's first episode: "Sydney, on a train, in lingerie, flirts with a man to get into his . . . briefcase. He unlocks it, revealing a canister containing an unstable isotope." And "Shanghai: 72 hours earlier. . . . Sydney, in a naughty schoolgirl outfit, escapes with a contact into a club's bathroom.")

"Lost" involves forty-eight people who are stranded on a remote island in the Pacific (it is shot on Oahu) when their plane crashes on its way from Sydney to Los Angeles, after travelling a thousand miles off course. The absurdities begin instantly: when you see the wreckage of the plane, some of it on the beach and some of it in the forest nearby, it's pretty obvious that no one could possibly have survived the crash, but none of the characters seem to wonder why they weren't all killed. Some people are seriously injured, but most of them have made it through with just a few scratches. Matthew Fox, who plays Jack, a doctor, spends the first few minutes of the show, after he regains consciousness, running around like a "Survivor" contestant trying to win a challenge: he performs CPR; he tends to a man whose leg has been mangled below the knee; and he makes sure that the plane's wing doesn't land on a pregnant woman. With his take-charge surgeon's personality, Jack quickly becomes the group's authority figure. Cries of "Where's Jack?" and "Get Jack!" are heard regularly throughout the first season, which will end on May 25th, with a two-hour finale (opposite the finale of Fox's "American Idol"). But he is definitely not the most compelling of the fourteen characters whose stories have unfolded so far. Nor is Kate (Evangeline Lilly), a young woman who, as we see in flashbacks, has a much more interesting past than one would guess from her seeming lack of personality. Lilly is fairly new to the acting profession; finally, by the end of the season, she becomes more than just a pretty face.

The characters make up a mini U.N.—in addition to Jack and Kate, who are white Americans, there's a Korean couple, an African-American father and son, a one-hit British rock musician and heroin addict, an Iraqi communications expert (the show upped its ante considerably by making this character a former member of the Republican Guard). There is also, of course, the inevitable hotheaded jerk, and a couple of people of unclear occupational provenance. One of them, a hugely overweight young Hispanic man named Hurley (Jorge Garcia), provides the little humor there is to be had, with his deadpan imperturbability. The other, a middle-aged white man, John Locke (Terry O'Quinn), is the true center of the series—the mystery at its core. From the beginning, strange things happen on the island: loud, crashing noises come from the interior; there's a deadly monster in there (not to mention a polar bear, who shows up in the second episode, signalling that there either were or are other people on the island); and the plane's transceiver, plucked from the wreckage, picks up an inexplicable radio transmission, in French, from somewhere nearby. Locke is the human correlative of the island, the embodiment of all that is unknowable. You can never tell what his true motives or intentions are, and even when he's just standing on the beach looking out to sea he can appear both benign and frightening. (In guest roles, O'Quinn, a bald, sturdy, confident-looking man, frequently plays a military officer.) There was a shot of him midway through the first episode that gave me chills. Without having spoken to anyone on the island yet, he turns to Kate and smiles, and you see an unearthly orange glow where his teeth should be. What's going on here? Is he about to consume the others in a ball of fire? No, I realized after a few seconds. He's eating an orange, and is taking a childlike pleasure in letting the rind be his smile.

"Lost" relies a little too heavily on shaky-cam effects and bang-on-a-can music for its unsettling quality—and shots of people suddenly running through the trees in terror after realizing that some unseen danger is nigh do stop being exciting after you've seen them twenty times. But Abrams and Lindelof have been wily and mostly sure-footed in this show. They have not rushed to reveal too much about the characters; the flashbacks don't overexplain things; and there are still many other survivors they can pull into the plot next fall. (And perhaps those characters will explain what they've been doing while off-camera all season long—playing beach volleyball?) Though promos have promised that some answers to the show's mysteries will be revealed in the season finale, you know that any answers are likely to be provisional and dubious, and to lead us further into "Lost" 's heart of darkness. ♦

HOW'S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT

From the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News.

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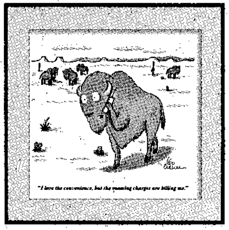
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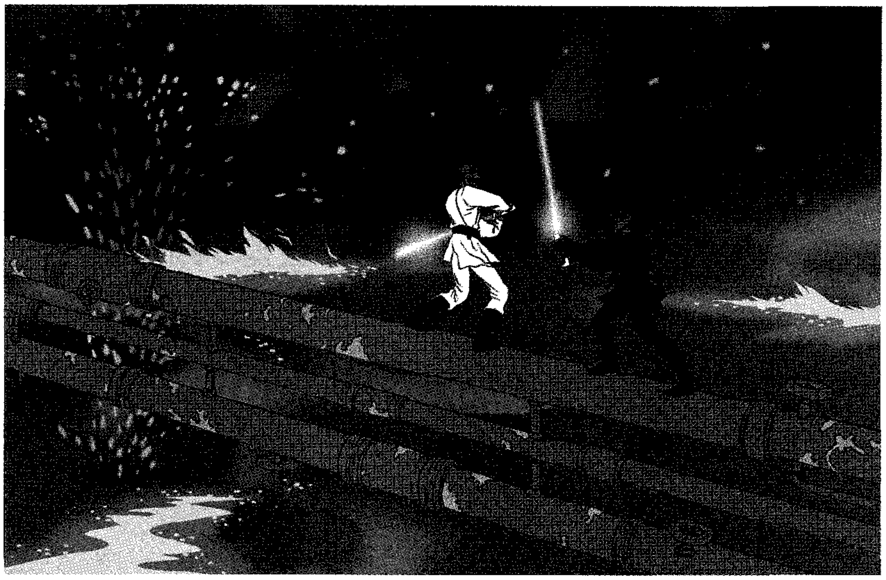
"Star Wars: Episode III."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker, together again.

Sith. What kind of a word is that? Sith. It sounds to me like the noise that emerges when you block one nostril and blow through the other, but to George Lucas it is a name that trumpets evil. What is proved beyond question by "Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith," the latest—and, you will be shattered to hear, the last—installment of his sci-fi bonanza, is that Lucas, though his eye may be greedy for sensation, has an ear of purest cloth. All those who concoct imagined worlds must populate and name them, and the resonance of those names is a fairly accurate guide to the mettle of the imagination in question. Tolkien, earthed in Old English, had a head start that led him straight to the flinty perfection of Mordor and Orc. Here, by contrast, are some Lucas inventions: Palpatine. Sidious. Mace Windu. (Isn't that something you spray on colicky babies?) Bail Organa. And Sith.

Lucas was not always a rootless soul. He made "American Graffiti," which yielded with affection to the gravitational pull of the small town. Since then, he has swung out of orbit, into deep nonsense, and the new film is the apotheosis of that drift. One stab of humor and the whole conceit would pop, but I have a grim feeling that Lucas wishes us to honor the remorseless noncomedy of his galactic conflict, so here goes. Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) and his star pupil, Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen), are, with the other Jedi knights, defending the Republic against the encroachments of the Sith and their allies—millions of dumb droids, led by Count Dooku (Christopher Lee) and his henchman, General Grievous, who is best described as a slaying mantis. Meanwhile, the Chancellor of the Republic, Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid), is engaged in a sly bout of Realpolitik, suspected by nobody except Anakin, Obi-Wan, and every single person watching the movie. Anakin, too, is a divided figure, wrenched between his Jedi devotion to selfless duty and a lurking hunch that, if he bides his time and trashes his best friends, he may eventually get to wear a funky black mask and start breathing like a horse.

This film is the tale of his temptation. We already know the outcome—Anakin will indeed drop the killer-monk Jedi look and become Darth Vader, the hockey goalkeeper from hell—because it forms the substance of the original "Star Wars." One of the things that make Episode III so dismal is the time and effort expended on Anakin's conversion. Early in the story, he enjoys a sprightly lightsabre duel with Count Dooku, which ends with the removal of the Count's hands. (The stumps glow, like logs on a fire; there is nothing here that reeks of human blood.) Anakin prepares to scissor off the head, while the mutilated Dooku kneels for mercy. A nice setup, with Palpatine egging our hero on from the background. The trouble is that Anakin's choice of action now will be decisive, and the remaining two hours of the film—scene after scene in which Hayden Christensen has to glower and glare, blazing his conundrum to the skies—will add nothing to the result. "Something's happening. I'm not the Jedi I should be," he says. This is especially worrying for his wife, Padmé (Natalie Portman), who is great with child. Correction: with children.

What can you say about a civilization where people zip from one solar system to the next as if they were changing their socks but where a woman fails to register for an ultrasound, and thus to realize that she is carrying twins until she is about to give birth? Mind you, how Padmé got pregnant is anybody's guess, although I'm prepared to wager that it involved Anakin nipping into a broom closet with a warm glass jar and a copy of *Ewok Babes*. After all, the Lucasian universe is drained of all reference to bodily functions. Nobody ingests or excretes. Language remains unblue. Smoking and cursing are out of bounds, as is drunkenness, although personally I wouldn't go near the place without a hip flask. Did Lucas learn nothing from "Alien" and "Blade Runner"—from the suggestion that other times and places might be no less rusted and septic than ours, and that the creation of a disinfected galaxy, where even the storm troopers wear bright-white outfits, looks not so much fantastical as dated? What Lucas has devised, over six movies, is a terrible puritan dream: a morality tale in which both sides are bent on moral cleansing, and where their differences can be assuaged only by a triumphant circus of violence. Judging from the whoops and crowings that greeted the opening credits, this is the only dream we are good for. We get the films we deserve.

The general opinion of "Revenge of the Sith" seems to be that it marks a distinct improvement on the last two episodes, "The Phantom Menace" and "Attack of the Clones." True, but only in the same way that dying from natural causes is preferable to crucifixion. So much here is guaranteed to cause either offense or pain, starting with the nineteen-twenties leather football helmet that Natalie Portman suddenly dons for no reason, and rising to the continual horror of Ewan McGregor's accent. "Another happy landing"—or, to be precise, "anothah heppy lending"—he remarks, as Anakin parks the front half of a burning starcruiser on a convenient airstrip. The young Obi-Wan Kenobi is not, I hasten to add, the most nauseating figure onscreen; nor is R2-D2 or even C-3PO, although I still fail to understand why I should have been expected to waste twenty-five years of my life following the progress of a beeping trash can and a gay, gold-plated Jeeves.

No, the one who gets me is Yoda. May I take the opportunity to enter a brief plea in favor of his extermination? Any educated moviegoer would know what to do, having watched that helpful sequence in "Gremlins" when a small, sage-colored beastie is fed into an electric blender. A fittingly frantic end, I feel, for the faux-pensive stillness on which the Yoda legend has hung. At one point in the new film, he assumes the role of cosmic shrink—squatting opposite Anakin in a noirish room, where the light bleeds sideways through slatted blinds. Anakin keeps having problems with his dark side, in the way that you or I might suffer from tennis elbow, but Yoda, whose reptilian smugness we have been encouraged to mistake for wisdom, has the answer. "Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose," he says. Hold on, Kermit, run that past me one more time. If you ever got laid (admittedly a long shot, unless we can dig you up some undiscerning alien hottie with a name like Jar Jar Gabor), and spawned a brood of Yodettes, are you saying that you'd leave them behind at the first sniff of danger? Also, while we're here, what's with the screwy syntax? Deepest mind in the galaxy, apparently, and you still express yourself like a day-tripper with a dog-eared phrase book. "I hope right you are." Break me a fucking give.

The prize for the least speakable burst of dialogue has, over half a dozen helpings of "Star Wars," grown into a fiercely contested tradition, but for once the winning entry is clear, shared between Anakin and Padmé for their exchange of endearments at home:

> "You're so beautiful."
> "That's only because I'm so in love."
> "No, it's because I'm so in love with you."

For a moment, it looks as if they might bat this one back and forth forever, like a baseline rally on a clay court. And if you think the script is on the tacky side, get an eyeful of the décor. All of the interiors in Lucasworld are anthems to clean living, with molded furniture, the tranquillity of a morgue, and none of the clutter and quirkiness that signify the process known as existence. Illumination is provided not by daylight but by a dispiriting plastic sheen, as if Lucas were coating all private affairs—those tricky little threats to his near-fascistic rage for order—in a protective glaze. Only outside does he relax, and what he relaxes into is apocalypse. "Revenge of the Sith" is a zoo of rampant storyboards. Why show a pond when C.G.I. can deliver a lake that gleams to the far horizon? Why set a paltry house on fire when you can stage your final showdown on an entire planet that streams with ruddy, gulping lava? Whether the director is aware of John Martin, the Victorian painter who specialized in the cataclysmic, I cannot say, but he has certainly inherited that grand perversity, mobilized it in every frame of the film, and thus produced what I take to be unique: an art of flawless and irredeemable vulgarity. All movies bear a tint of it, in varying degrees, but it takes a vulgarian genius such as Lucas to create a landscape in which actions can carry vast importance but no discernible meaning, in which style is strangled at birth by design, and in which the intimate and the ironic, not the Sith, are the principal foes to be suppressed. It is a vision at once gargantuan and murderously limited, and the profits that await it are unfit for contemplation. I keep thinking of the rueful Obi-Wan Kenobi, as he surveys the holographic evidence of Anakin's betrayal. "I can't watch anymore," he says. Wise words, Obi-Wan, and I shall carry them in my heart. ♦

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Volume LXXXI, No. 14, May 23, 2005. The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X) is published weekly (except for six combined issues: Jan. 24 & 31, Feb. 14 & 21, June 13 & 20, July 11 & 18, Aug. 8 & 15, Dec. 26 & Jan. 2) by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. David Carey, vice-president and publisher; William Li, associate publisher; Ronda Carnegie, advertising director; Gail Day, advertising director; Marie Wolpert, advertising director; Jamie Engel, advertising manager; Susan Harrington, director of creative services; Ilene Danuff, marketing services director; Douglas Chilcott, associate creative services director/promotion; L. Paul Robertson, associate creative services director/events; Rosemary Stanton, advertising business director; Edward Klaris, general counsel. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Steven T. Florio, vice-chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.O.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.F.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president–human resources; John Buese, executive vice-president–chief information officer; David Orlin, senior vice-president–strategic sourcing; Robert Bennis, senior vice-president–real estate. Shared services provided by Advance Magazine Group: David B. Chemidlin, senior vice-president–general manager, shared services center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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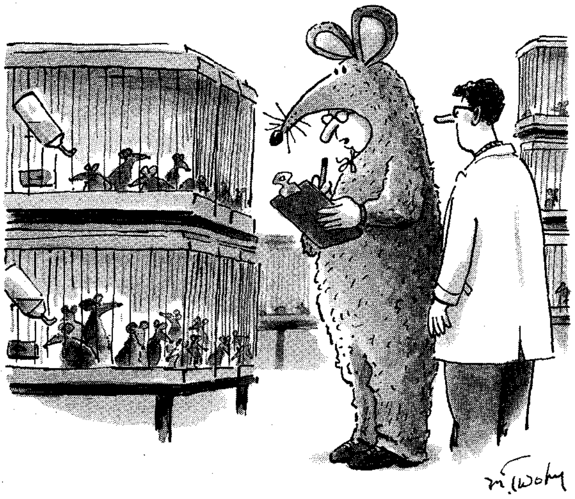
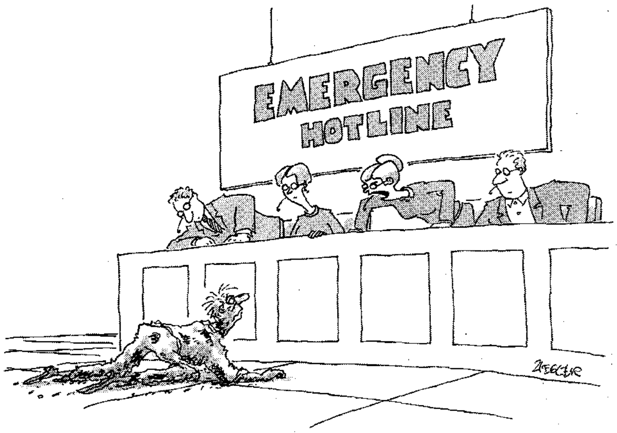
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by David Sipress, must be received by Sunday, May 22nd. Finalists in the May 9th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 6th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

WINNING CAPTION



"More important, however, is what I learned about myself."
Roy Futterman, New York City.



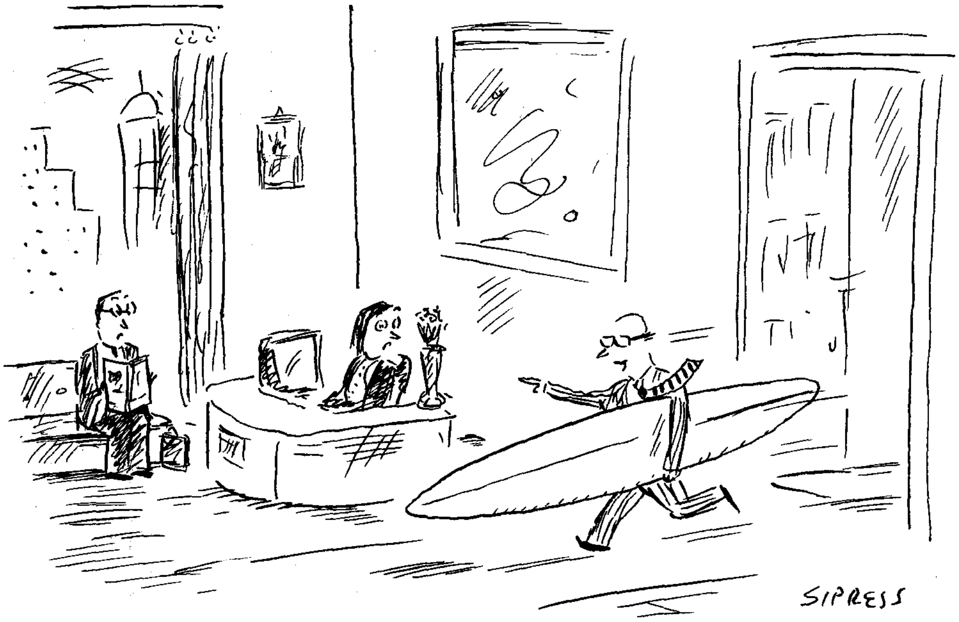
THE FINALISTS

"This better be good. That floor was waxed last night!"
Preston MacDougall, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

"Would it kill you to use a few of your roaming minutes?"
Jennifer Cain, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Neither the time nor the place, Doug!"
Miriam Steinberg, Cambridge, Mass.

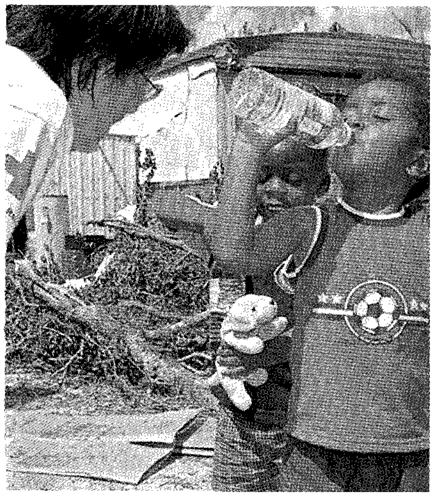
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

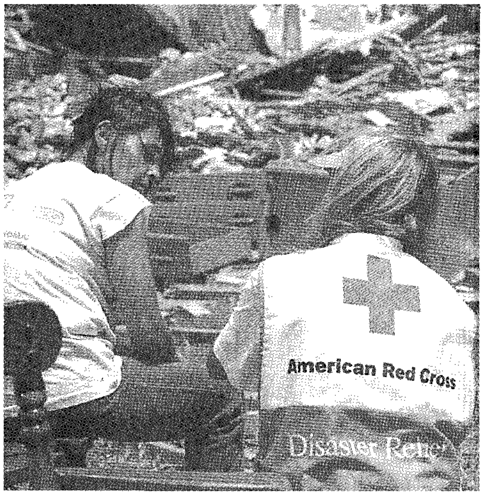


"   "

[illegible] written [illegible]
United States
Constitution.

—WILL ROGERS, 1930




American Red Cross
Disaster Relief

...Will Rogers would certainly have his hands full today.

Every minute, every day

While you read this, the Red Cross is responding to disasters of every size and scope, providing relief to those in need—free of charge. Whether the crisis is immediate and local or spans the globe, the Red Cross is there.

Protecting American life

Even before disaster strikes, the Red Cross teaches people how to prepare and to minimize potential harm. The Red Cross empowers Americans to create safer homes, communities, workplaces and schools.

America's lifeblood

Blood means life. From critically ill newborns to trauma victims, their lives are changed by generous volunteers who give the Red Cross more than 6 million units of blood each year. The Red Cross can quickly provide lifesaving blood wherever it's needed, across the country.

Meeting the challenge

The Red Cross is increasingly challenged by the changing nature and magnitude of threats facing today's world. Last year saw disasters, both domestic and overseas, that stretched the organization to the limit. Today, the Red Cross must build its capacity nationally and within each community to respond effectively and swiftly to every disaster.

It takes your help

Our mission is clear: The Red Cross is America's partner in preparedness and leader in disaster response. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it functions as a private organization with public responsibility. The Red Cross relies on broad public support to meet broad public needs.

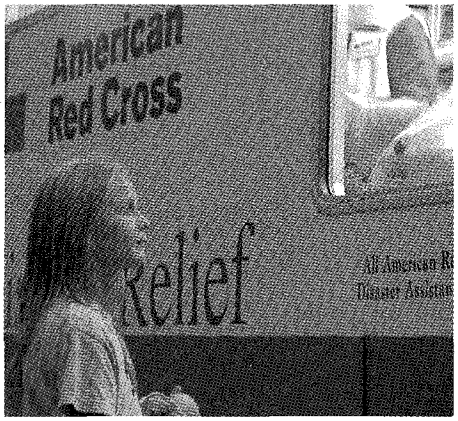
A trusted partner

As one of America's most trusted charities, the Red Cross strives to be the best possible steward of donated funds—with 91 cents of every dollar spent going directly to those in need. When you give to the Red Cross, you can trust that you are giving wisely.

There is a place

In America, we share a common spirit that binds us together when times are tough and unites us in action when people are suffering. America is a place where we take care of each other. *When you help the American Red Cross, you help America.*

You can support the lifesaving services of the American Red Cross by making a financial contribution, donating blood and volunteering your time and talent.

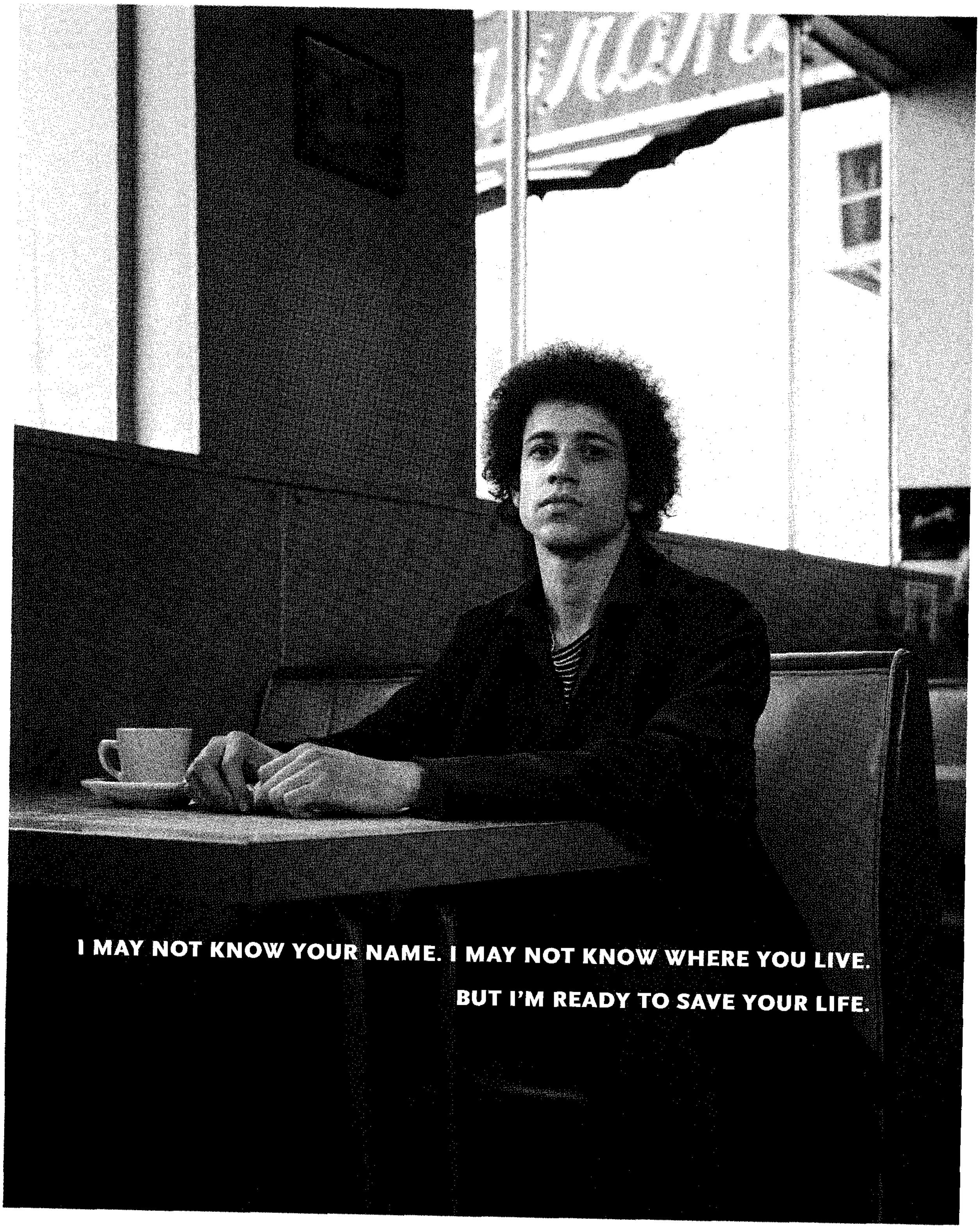


To learn more, contact your local Red Cross, call 1-800-HELP-NOW or visit *www.redcross.org/tny*.

To learn more about blood donation and to make an appointment, visit *www.givelife.org*.

American Red Cross

Together, we can save a life


I MAY NOT KNOW YOUR NAME. I MAY NOT KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE.
BUT I'M READY TO SAVE YOUR LIFE.

When you help the American Red Cross, you help America.

American Red Cross

We all have to look out for each other. And with thousands of Americans requiring help every day, someone needs you to volunteer now.

Contact your local chapter or visit redcross.org/newyorker

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Skinny-dipping vs. swimming suit.

There's joy in going beyond convention. A thrill in living on the edge. For proof, look no further than the new Boxster. The legendary roadster, reinvented. Every facet from race-bred chassis to side-view mirror rigorously perfected to deliver a more liberating driving experience. Porsche. There is no substitute.

The new Boxster S

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